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By Robert Gibson Jones

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2. The entire editorial policy of *Amazing Stories,* as well as its sister publication *Fantastic Adventures,* will be revamped, modernized and given top treatment in action, characterization, pace, plot and drama. The high quality of the stories to be featured will be unequalled anywhere.
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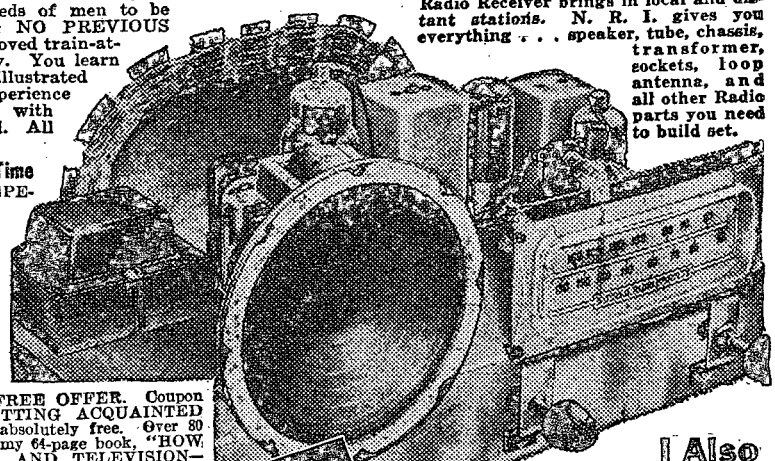

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VOLUME 12 NUMBER 1

All Stories Complete

THE USURPERS (Novelette—15,300) ..... by Geoff St. Reynard 8
Illustrated by Leo Ramon Summers
You think you've never seen an alien? Don't be too sure; your neighbor may be one—in disguise!

THE MAN WHO COULD NOT DIE (Short—8,000) ..... by Lee Francis 34
Illustrated by Bill Terry
Larry Stern had a reason for wanting to die—but death was deliberately avoiding him....

JIRANDEL (Short—3,000) ..... by Warren Kastel 50
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Can a world exist in only one person's mind?—possibly, until others can envision it too....

SANCTUARY (Novelette—10,000) ..... by Charles Recour 58
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His world had been shattered by war, but he searched on—seeking a lost sanctuary....

THE EXTEROCEPTOR DECEPTOR (Short—6,000) ..... by Craig Browning 74
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He wanted to make his wife jealous, so he had the machine create a duplicate—of *her*....

THE GOLDEN MASK OF AGHARTI (Novelette—22,000) ..by John & Dorothy deCourcy 86
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What was the great peril that threatened Agharti? And who was the Man in the Golden Mask?

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Out of the depths of the sea came the new masters of Earth—seeking men as their slaves! ...

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Pablo felt secure in his cavern world—but what was this strange, distant rumbling?....

Front cover painting by Ramon Naylor, illustrating a scene from "The Usurpers"

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

IN THE past few years we've mentioned the names of quite a few good writers who have appeared in FA. We've even told you a few things about the writers, little sidelights of interest that we thought you'd like to know about.

THIS MONTH we'd like to mention a little bit about another good writer—and more so, a man who in our humble opinion is the top editor in the science fiction field. You older fans of FA will remember the first issue of your favorite magazine, published in May 1939. And you will remember that it was Ray Palmer who signed that first editorial, and who has been the heart of the magazine ever since.

WE'RE NOT going to become maudlin here when we tell you that this is the first issue of FA that does not carry Ray's name on the masthead. To a great many of you readers this will come as a complete surprise, possibly even a sad one. And of course that's understandable. Ray, in his friendly way, built up FA to something more than just a magazine. He injected a feeling of intimateness into it, where reader and editor were united via the printed word into more than a casual friendship. Rap's words in that first editorial—over eleven years ago—stated that future relationship quite simply: "Fantastic Adventures is *your* magazine, prepared *especially* for you." And FA has always been just that.

RIGHT NOW, we'd like to echo Ray's words and say that it will *continue* to be your magazine—just like it always has been. We've been fortunate to become a part of that friendship between editor and reader established under Rap's capable management and we're going to continue bringing FA to you in the same friendly way. That's what you want, and we wouldn't think of changing it.

ALONG THESE lines we'd like to acquaint you with an old friend who has returned to FA. Many of you will remember Howard Browne, the former Managing Editor of your favorite magazine. Howard, like the rest of us, was also a member of that editor-reader friendship, the trademark of all Ziff-Davis magazines. Howard left FA two years ago to devote his full time to writing. Under his now famous penname of John Evans, he has established his "*Halo*" novels as something unique in the fields of mystery-suspense writing. Not to mention the fact that he has written over 500 radio scripts along with his novels! Well, Howard has returned to take over Rap's editorial chair, and he echoes our own views by saying that FA will continue to be the type of magazine that Ray Palmer was so proud of. He adds: "The only change we can hope to make is to find even better stories for our readers."

SO WHAT IS Rap doing these days? We're more than happy to give a grand guy a plug in this column. The next time you go to your newsstand, look for a magazine called FATE. It's Ray's new baby and he's as proud of it as any deserving parent. And we on FA wish him every success in the world. But knowing Ray as we do, we feel sure that such a wish is superfluous.

SO WHAT is in store for you readers this issue? Some of the best science fiction stories you've ever read! Leading off is our cover story, "The Usurpers", by Geoff St. Reynard. You all remember Geoff's now classic stories, "Blue Bottle Fly" and "Five Years In the Marmalade". We predict that you will remember his new novelette just as long! It's the story of an alien menace threatening the Earth—a menace that was almost impossible to eliminate because the aliens masqueraded as *men!* When you reach the end of this story we predict you'll feel a tremor or two, and maybe you'll look more than once at the next man you meet on the street!

THERE ARE many other swell yarns waiting for your reading pleasure too. Among them, Lee Francis tells us about "The Man Who Could Not Die." Warren Kastel presents a unique fantasy, entitled, "Jirandel." Charles Recour offers "Sanctuary." Craig Browning writes about "The Exteroceptor Deceptor." John and Dorothy deCourcy bring a sequel to "The Man From Agharti" with "The Golden Mask of Agharti." Anthony B. Ott presents a story of the future, "Revolt In Pacifico", and lastly, Berkeley Livingston offers "The Crumbling World".

NEXT MONTH we've really got a treat in store for you. A new book-length novel by top writer, Theodore Sturgeon, entitled, "The Dreaming Jewels." Watch for it. We'll be seeing you then.....WLH

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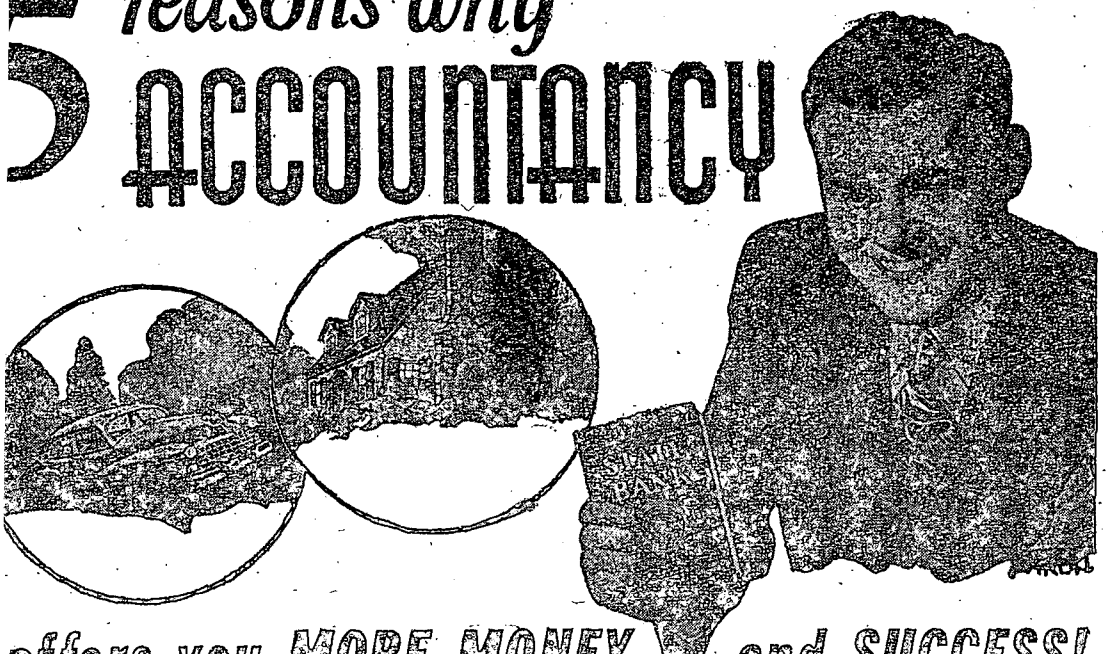

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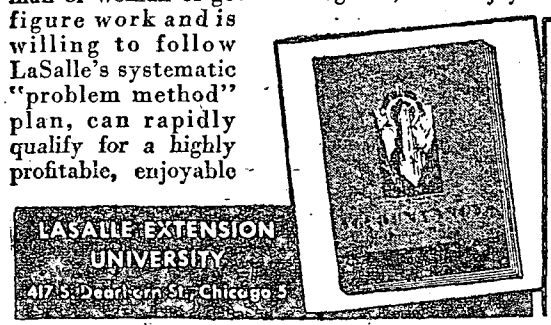

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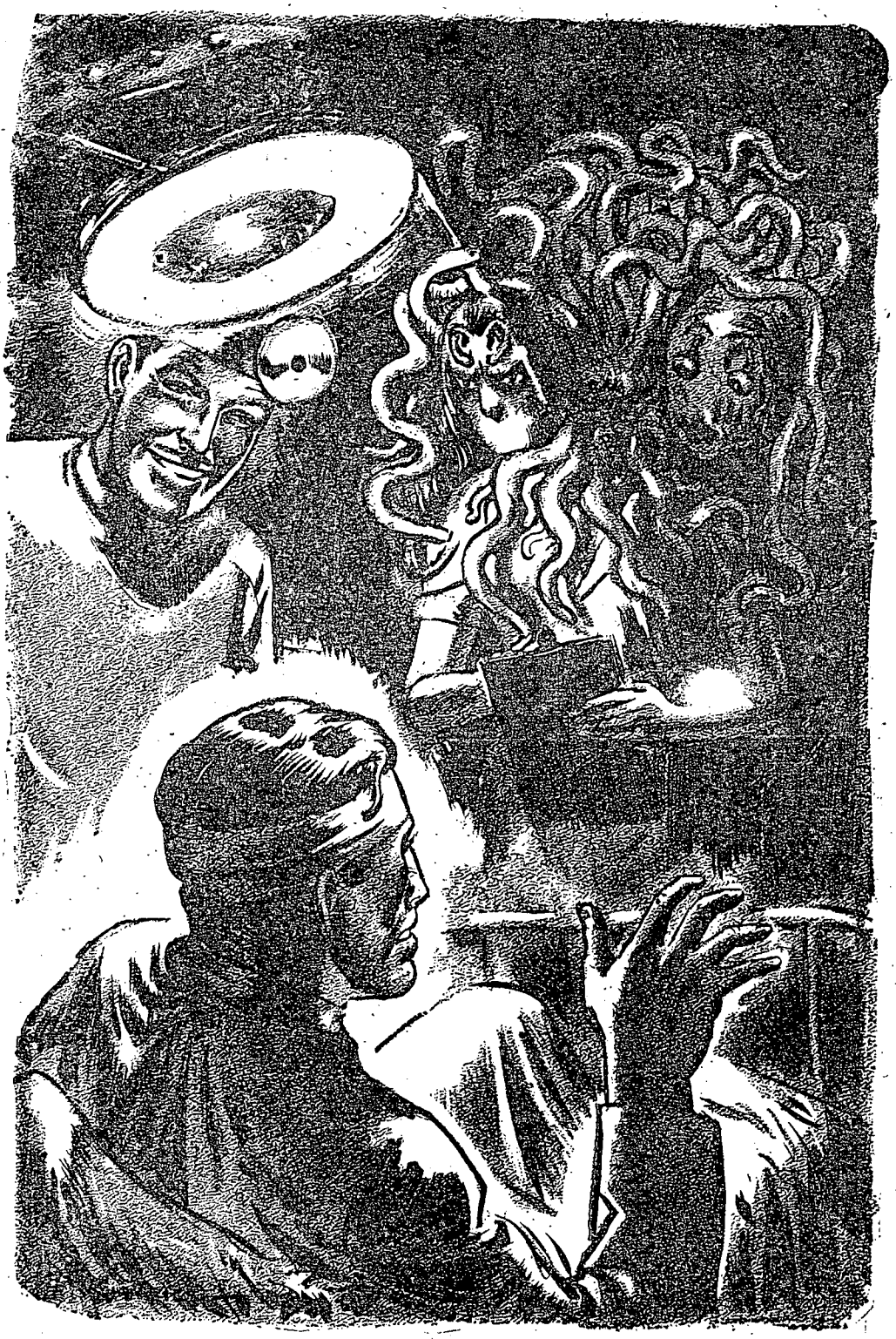

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The USURPERS

by GEOFF ST. REYNARD

Is it possible that aliens walk the earth masquerading as human beings? Jerry Wolfe knew it was true — he had seen them!

A needy, hollow-eyed, sharp-looking wretch,
A living-dead man.
—The Comedy Of Errors

"BRANDY IN the library, Johnson," I said to the waiter.

I walked through the crowded dining room—it was a Saturday and everyone was in town—and through the huge "mausoleum" with its dozing old men in their deep armchairs dreaming about happier, younger days, and into the library. Selecting one comfortable end of the maroon leather Chesterfield, I sank into its cool depths and wriggled myself into a position from which I could stare at the terrible scar that runs through the east wall, right down from ceiling through bookshelves to cracked marble floor.

I have a sneaking affection for that dreadful eyesore. It was made by a dud bomb, just a little fellow, who burrowed his way down through our club in the darkest days of the London blitz—and although he utterly spoiled our sets of Dickens, Scott, Meredith, and Hardy, and pulverized seven volumes of The Decline And Fall, not to mention obliterating a first edition of one of Keats' things, I forget which—well, I shall be sorry indeed when the Gloucester Club finally gets around to repairing the damage he did. The ugly swath he cut reminds me of the War, you see. Oh, I've no nostalgia for it! As any normal man must, I loathe and abominate war. But in those days I had a dozen friends who are gone now; I had comradeship and a high courageous good humor all about me; and I had my left arm, instead of a sleeve which I must pin to the front of my coat every morning. When I look at the scar of the little dud, I can hear the ghosts of laughter and of jests cracked in the face of Hell's own fire; I can hear Johnny Kildane's voice saying, "Ruddy good barrage the Huns are gettin' tonight"—and Art Millan's answering drawl, "Please Jove they'll hang about till we can get up there on their tails!"

I suppose it's much the same sort of thing those old duffers in the "mausoleum" remember as they gaze like so many mummies at the huge portraits of generals and admirals who were already legends when I was born. From the expressions on some of their withered faces, I imagine they can even smell the powder and the smoke drifting over the battlefields....Lord! We old soldiers are a dreamy lot.

Johnson drifted in bearing a great breather glass with a wee puddle of brandy in the bottom. I warmed it

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with my hands and sighed a little as I thought about—what I thought about.

And then Jerry Wolfe came into the library, or at any rate, his ghost did. He, or it, came straight over and dropped down on the Chesterfield beside me, and as well as I could with one arm I pressed him or it, to my chest and made loud noises of disbelief.

I say "ghost" for two reasons: one, I had thought he was long since dead and buried; and two, he looked as though he'd just taken out a long-term lease on a marble tomb and was about to move in. Haggard, greying at the temples, his eyes sunken, his suit torn and dirty, he looked positively ghastly.

Nevertheless, it was really old Jerry, and I beat him on the back and crowed happily, much to the horror of the older members seated near us.

"Wolfe, you flea-covered sun-baked, lousy old relic of a bygone day, how the flaming hell are you?" I yammered.

The ghost grinned, with just a faint touch of the old Wolfe gaiety, and said, with more feeling than I'd ever heard put into the words before, "Alec, old horse, you are a sight for sore eyes. But please don't advertise my presence so loudly, will you?"

Johnson materialized at my elbow. I gave him the high sign for a bottle of Scotch, and with a grave nod he faded again. "Jerry," I said happily, "I thought you'd got it years ago."

He gave me a lopsided and feeble imitation of the justly celebrated Wolfe smile, and said, "Well, it hasn't been years, but I've had it."

THEN BEFORE I could hem and haw and ask him what he meant, Johnson came up, apparently through the floor, with a bottle of the best and a siphon on a tray with a couple of glasses. I splashed about five fingers into a glass, dampened it slightly with soda, and passed it to Wolfe, who looked as if he needed it. When we were alone again, he leaned back against the maroon leather and stared into his drink as though it had been a crystal ball.

"Alec Talbot, you one-armed paperhanger, you are a veritable sight for sore eyes," he repeated. Then he took a sip that would have drowned a medium-sized rhinoceros, and was silent.

He was still a handsome big man, was Jerry Wolfe, as he sprawled there on the Chesterfield beside me in his worn blue suit; lean, just-tanned-enough face, small mustache, long rangy body, he looked precisely like the man I had last seen at Dunkirk, years upon years ago.... And yet there were the differences. His eyes, for one thing. His grey hair. And his face was somber—not exactly sullen, but without the faintest trace of happiness in it. I leaned closer and squinted at his sunken eyes. They were a cool ice-blue, as they'd always been, and all around them were little short dashes of pink-white scars, like tiny hen-tracks, running clean across the bridge of his nose and scattering out from his eyes toward the ears.

"You've caught one," I said.

Ruefully he touched a finger to his eyebrow. "We were playing the silly-mad asses with some old Tower muskets we'd found in a secret cache near Peshawar," he said. "It was shortly before we vacated India. We were almost the last to leave. Some fool—you know him, and I won't tell you his name—let off one of them at a Rampur hound that was lolloping past. We were all fairly tight, so there was some excuse. Well, I was standing just beside it,

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the muzzle of the musket I mean, and the flash took me spang across the eyes. They were in a bandage when we left India. The medico took them off on the boat comin' back."

"So you've been in India," I said.

"Five years."

"I'd thought you were dead. Most of our old gang is, you know."

"All the better for them," said he cryptically. "Pour me another, will you, Alec?"

I sloshed him out another half-pint, put a spray of soda on the surface. "I don't know," I said reflectively. "I've lost a flipper, but I'm glad to be around even so. The sun still shines once a month."

"Listen to me, old hound," said Jerry Wolfe, fixing me with those sunken, scarred, hypnotic ice-blue eyes. "I'm going to tell you my yarn, must tell it to you, and when I'm done you'll either curse me for a maniac, or damn me for telling you what no man on the earth should know. I don't want to tell you, you understand, but I *must* tell someone, as the man always says before he spiels his little speech; and you're the first and only candidate I've met whom I *could* tell. And it's vital. So frightfully vital."

"Haven't you seen any of our boys at all till now?" I asked, feeling pretty uncomfortable at his queer words. "Kinkaid's in town somewhere, and—"

"Kinkaid," said Jerry, looking as if the name put a dark brown taste into his mouth. "I've seen him. Couldn't very well tell *him*."

"Well, go ahead, old chap," I said, thinking it couldn't be as bad by half as he was looking, and that it was probably some deep dark sin that he'd brooded on till it got out of proportion. "Let's have it."

"All right, Alec, and forgive me in advance, will you?"

"For what, Jerry?"

"For spoiling your sleep for the rest of your life," said he, and after another long drink he went on to tell me his story.

I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.
—Hamlet

THE DAY they took off the bandages (he said) was a wonderfully balmy day in midocean. The sun was hot, but not too much so, and the little sea breezes were all around the ship, and every so often you could hear the gulls squawk.

My eyes had been burnt, as well as the flesh around them, and for a while they'd despaired of my eyesight, but now the doctor thought I'd be as well as ever, barring that I might have to wear glasses.

I lay on my bed in the cabin, while the doctor and his nurse puttered with the many thicknesses of gauze which bound my head. Gradually the world, which had been pitch dark for months and months, began to grow lighter; I fidgeted with the covers under me—I was lying on top of them, fully dressed, for barring my eyes I was of course perfectly fit—and I thought they'd never get the beastly things off.

As though I'd been on the bottom of a dark lake, and was now swimming toward the surface, things shimmered out of obscurity; a dark shape above me was the doctor, busily unwinding...a round light glowing off to the left was the porthole ...a blur on the right was the nurse. Another layer came off, and my world grew even clearer. And then,

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the final strip of gauze went peeling away, and I could see.

The first thing my eyes drank in—they were thirsty for sight after the ages of blindness—was the dear old doctor bending over me, so much anxiety written on his big white face that you'd have thought I was his own son. I grinned and grabbed him by the shoulders as I lay there. "You've worked it! I can see," I yelled.

Relief spread over his features. He straightened up.

I took a look at the porthole. Sky, blue sky. You've no notion what a miraculous thing the sky is.

"I'm a dervish if I think I'll even need glasses," I said.

"Is there any pain from the light?"

"Not one jolly iota," I said, turning my head to look at the nurse.

I looked at her.

At first there was no reaction, none at all. I just lay there looking at the nurse, feeling no pain, feeling no fear, feeling no sensation whatever. I just looked, suspended as it were in a great void somewhere in the vacuum of space, outside comprehension.

She had three heads.

The one on the left was rather like that of a human being, excepting that it had a number of ears all over the forehead, and there wasn't any mouth that I could see. The one on the right was a perfect reproduction of one of those silly little things we used to see in drops of water in bio class—amoebas, I think you call 'em. The middle one was far too horrid to describe. It had tentacles in the center. The body of the creature was a curious amorphism, running to limbs where there shouldn't be any, its outline changing from minute to minute as the thing moved. The triple heads were fairly constant. Vaguely I could see that within or behind its horrible writhing shape was that of a woman; a white-uniformed nurse.

I can sit here and describe the creature coldly and clearly like this because of what I've seen since. At the moment all I could do, when the paralysis wore off and I realized what I was seeing, was throw my head back and scream, and scream, and scream....

And all the while, as I tore my throat out with the screaming, I was realizing somewhere deep inside my brain that this—this being, this monster, was the nurse, and that to the doctor and to everyone else she looked like an utterly normal person, a girl in a white, starched uniform who was probably rather pretty. I don't know how I knew it. I just knew. Perhaps it was my Irish blood, givin' me the second sight. I realized at once that I was the only soul who could see her like that, and it was because something had been done to my eyes by that flash of powder months before.

AND I ALSO knew then, somehow, as clear as though my great-grandmother, who was a witch in an Irish bog, had whispered it in my ear, that what I saw was a mild beginning for what I would presently see. Don't ask me how; I *knew*.

When my lungs had spent themselves and my throat was raw, I lay there and stared at the horrified doctor. He was so blessed human. He was so real, so ordinary.

"Sorry," I murmured hoarsely. "Hysterics. Rotten nerves, I suppose. Inexcusable."

I felt that, whatever happened, I didn't dare let *her* know that I could see her as she was.

How did I know that my eyes weren't playing tricks, that I wasn't seeing a phantasm of my own im-

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agining? I don't know, but I was sure that the revolting being with the three heads was masquerading as a person, and that I mustn't let her know I'd found out her secret.

When I got hold of myself I took another look at her. Behind her true structure I could still see, as in a glass darkly, y'know, the figure of a nurse in white. It was as though the surpassingly ugly chunk of protoplasm was shimmering in front of a real woman, and its body was just transparent enough to enable me to see her behind it.

The head on the left, the one that was a kind of travestied human noggin, was looking at me speculatively. It wondered. It thought, and by heavens I could *feel* its cold slimy, inhuman, horrible thought, that perhaps I had better be looked into. I strove with the rebellious muscles of my face and produced for her what must have been the prize sickly smile of the year.

"Hello, nurse," I said.

"You're tired," said a girl's voice solicitously. "You'd better rest. If the doctor wants me to stay here—"

"Oh, no!" I yelled. "No, I want to go up on deck. I want to see people and, err, things."

"If you think you're all right, old man," said the doctor kindly. "I could have Miss Jones stay here with you, though."

"Oh, no, no, I want to go on deck," I babbled earnestly. "Really." Miss Jones! Merciful heavens! Miss Jones! That thing!

I staggered up and went out on deck. There were a number of people in lounging chairs and two figures playing shuffleboard up the deck a little way. I lurched to the rail and clung to it like grim death.

One of the shuffleboarders was a vast unwieldy purple blotch, with greenish speckles all over it, and half a dozen eyes on stalks waving in the air. The other was all shiny and silver, its scales or plates or whatever they were caught the light and reflected it brightly, and it looked something like a shark and something like a side of beef. That's as near as I can come to a description of it.

Of the twelve or fourteen people sprawled on deck chairs, about seven were human beings. The others—ugh!

I turned with a spasmodic jerk and stared off toward the gently swelling horizon. I have no conception of how long I stood there. It may have been as much as three or four hours. A flight of gulls was all I saw, and they, thank God, were nothing but gulls, grey and white and broad-winged and beautiful.

When finally I turned from the rail I had come to a couple of decisions. I have not changed any of them since that day. I feel that I was right about the whole affair, impossibly, incredibly correct; I think, although there were many conclusions I might have come to, that I hit on the right one instinctively.

IN THE first place, it wasn't my eyes. I mean they weren't playing tricks on me. What I was seeing was there, had always been there, was as real and concrete as—as this bottle of Scotch whiskey. It was just that something had happened to my eyes. Some amazing freak wrought by the powder in that old Tower musket, some searing and reshaping of the pupils or corneas or whatever the devil it was, had twisted my vision into another dimension. Is that the term I want? Perhaps it is, and then again, perhaps it isn't; I was never one of your bookish johnnies. In each of

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these monstrosities I could see dimly what the human form was—see it as though the beast stood in front of the man and only partially obliterated him—and still with terrible clarity I could see the horrendous and unbelievable actuality.

I call it "the beast". That's for want of a better word. They aren't animals. They aren't people, although they've taken on the superficial look, and smell, and feel, of people. They are nothing for which we have a name. They are—they.

The "nurse" may have had a suspicion concerning my new gift of sight, but she couldn't be sure at all; and I would have to be frightfully circumspect in the future. I somehow got the feeling that if they knew I could see them they'd eliminate me at once. There was some sort of huge, cosmic secret abroad, which they were keeping to themselves. It was like a gargantuan masquerade party where half the revelers were alien beings, hiding their otherworldliness behind grinning masks.

Why, you may well ask, didn't I conclude that my eyes were playing practical jokes? Why, after such a close shave as my accident had been, wasn't it quite logical that my eyes would play me the same sort of deceitful tricks they sometimes play when a chap's had too much to drink?

I *knew*, Alec. There was a horrid cold emanation from these beings, a pulsing radiation, a fearfulness, a malignity of death's own breathing, which I felt clearly when I saw them; no eye-strain, eye-trick, or eye-fault could have given me those outside butterflies in my belly.

Well. What was I to do about it all?

Absolutely nothing. What could I do? Could I take the doctor aside and say to him seriously, "Old man, I'd like you to know that your nurse has three heads?"

Scarcely.

Could I tap the silver shark-thing on its "shoulder" and say coyly, "Ah, old chap, don't let me spoil your game of shuffleboard, but can I see your scales?"

Not unless I wanted to end up in an institution—or in the depths of the rolling green sea!

And speakin' of drinks and D.T.s, as I was a minute ago, do you know I believe that some of us can see them when we're drunk? Really howling tight, I mean; with alcohol bubbling in our ears and coursing through us. I think it does something to our dimension-sense, and dimly, faintly, we perceive what beasts are all about us. A little theory I've come around to, in the long winter evenings—let it pass. But next time a fellow has the delirium tremens and swears there's an ogre in the room, *don't laugh at him.* He may be right.

To get on with it. I turned from the rail, trying hard not to shriek at the sight of a greyish blob of greasy muck that was floating by on the arm of a handsome young Navy officer, and made for my cabin. I locked myself in—I had a notion that bolts and bars kept *them* out as effectively as though they'd been people, and eventually it turned out that I was right—and I flung myself down on my bed to think.

WHAT TO do? Nothing, nothing, nothing. It rang in my skull like a giant tocsin. There was not a thing in the world, the mad, horrible, soul-shattering world, that I could do about them. Except lie low, turn them a smiling countenance, and think for all I was worth. Be calm,

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be natural, and think, think, *think!*

After a little the nurse-beast came and tapped gently on my door. "Mister Wolfe," it called softly. "Mister Wolfe—Jerry?"

Oh, ye saints and godlings, it was going to try and seduce me! That smooth, silky voice, and that demonic body; heaven and hell! I think it suspected, and wanted to prove itself wrong. No man who had ever seen it in its true shape could have embraced the nurse-form within it. Talk about acid tests...!

Swiftly I thought. If I could put it off until night, perhaps I could—no, every nerve and muscle and bit of flesh and drop of blood in my body would have screeched aloud against such a ghastly union, even if darkness hid the beast-thing from my warped sight. Whether it grew suspicious or not, I must put it off. For good.

"I'm tired," I said to the door. "Terribly tired, and I just want to read. Tell the doctor I'll see him tomorrow, please."

There was a scuffle and a kind of ladylike growl of anger, and the creature went away. I sighed and collapsed.

My words had given me an idea, and in a moment I went to my bookshelf and got down my Shakespeare. Crushing out of my mind the question as to whether the Bard himself had been human or not, I flipped the pages idly, pillowing my head on my arm and trying to lose myself in the splendid poetry. Almost at once I found Hamlet crying out, "Oh, woe is me, to have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"

With a shudder that shook my body like an ague I turned to *King Richard III.* I began at the first of it and in fifteen minutes or so I had succeeded in putting my dilemma into the rear of my mind. The beast-world faded....

What in God's name was I reading?

Oh, I have passed a miserable night,
So full of ugly sights, of ghastly dreams,
That, as I am a Christian faithful man,
I would not spend another such a night,
Though 'twere to buy a world of happy days.
So full of dismal terror was the time!...
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!
Methought I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon....
With that, methought, a legion of foul friends
Environ'd me, and howled in mine ears
Such hideous cries that, with the very noise,
I trembling waked, and for a season after
Could not believe but that I was in hell,
Such terrible impression made my dream.

With a sob I hurled the bulky volume violently against the cabin wall, and lay there staring at the ceiling cursing at fate, at myself, and at the beast-things. Why had I not been blinded? Why hadn't the antique musket exploded and killed me for good and all, instead of throwing me alive into one of the deepest and foulest pits of Hell that man could ever have imagined?

If there are any gods in the cosmos, may they forgive the black lie I told the poor old doctor! I said I was a misogynist, a neurotic woman-hater. I asked him to tell his nurse she was not needed in my case any longer, and to leave her behind when he visited my cabin to treat my rapidly healing eyes. He nodded understandingly. I remained in my cabin throughout the voyage, and saw no more of the beast-people.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
....I have supp'd full with horrors.
—Macbeth

WHEN WE docked I of necessity stood in line with the other passengers to disembark, shuddering

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uncontrollably at the touch of various gruesome entities as they lurched against me. They appeared to take a perverse delight in touching me. Of course it was imagination. They couldn't have known about my eyes. But it did seem that nine out of ten people who brushed by me were the outre outsiders

If my sense of touch had been altered with my eyesight, I doubt whether I could have kept my reason. To feel those slimy-looking tentacles fingering my face; to touch the revolting greenish-blue sides of a man that resembled a lobster on wheels; to have the dead-alive blobs of fingers looking like earthworms entwined in mine, and to feel them, as one of the beast-creatures, appearing slightly drunk, shook hands with everyone on board! But everything felt as it always had. The silver shark-creature who stumbled against me felt warm and smelled of violets, just as a pretty girl might have done. The earthworms, when I shut my eyes involuntarily, were so many good strong fingers. No, only my sight was affected. It was a large mercy in the midst of a shattering terror that was turning my hair steadily greyer and greyer.

You know I've always loved music above everything else. When I had established myself in my old diggings in town, I phoned for three tickets to a symphony concert that was being presented that night. Three tickets, of course. The seat in the middle for myself, a vacant chair on either side. I couldn't have endured rubbing elbows cozily with a blob of ectoplasm.

I had dinner in my rooms—the waiter was a very human old Cockney—and just before curtain time I drove down town in a hired car and went into the hall, and down the dark aisle to my seats.

Music hath charms to soothe, eh? But not when the conductor grips his podium with seven or eight octopus arms, and waves the baton in a monstrous hand like a great black spider! Not when the drummer, who to everyone else is a jolly fat man, is to yourself nothing but a vast mauve splotch of flickering foggy matter, sending out arms and legs whenever he feels like it to beat his percussion instruments first with one and then another! Not when—but why go on?

I closed my eyes and gritted my teeth. I would have to get used to it. I had years and years, probably, in which to live among these nightmares. (Curiously, the idea of suicide had never entered my head.) And gradually the wonderful music stole over my tormented soul, and I forgave the fact that the leader was so grossly inhuman, and I breathed easier than I had since the bandages were stripped from my blighted eyes.

When the lights went up at intermission I looked around me. Pure force of habit. One does look about one when the lights go up.

Merciful powers of good and evil! What a congregation! The less said, the better by far.

But just across the vacant seat to my left sat Marion Black, blessedly real and human, pretty as a summer sky and looking to my poor tormented eyes like the gates of Paradise. With a glad, if far too loud, cry, I attracted her attention.

"Marion!" I shouted. "By Jove, Marion, old girl!"

"Jerry Wolfe!" she said, with that wonderful smile of hers that lights up a room like a sunburst. "Where have you been for the last decade?"

It hadn't been ten years, but it

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had been a very long time indeed. I moved over beside her, assured myself that she was alone, and began to jabber eighty to the minute. She must have thought me slightly tight.

As the house lights began to dim, "Let's get out of here and go have a real talk," I said. "I'm sick of the spider—I mean of the music."

BACK IN the primeval ages before the war I'd been engaged to Marion, until I'd seen Jennifer Tregennis one afternoon.... I should have felt like a cad at this meeting with Marion, but I didn't. And she was still, I think, in love with me. We rose and brushed over people's knees (I didn't look at them, I was terrified to do so), and left the hall. We got into my car and I drove to my apartment.

When she had a highball in her hand and I was seated at her feet in front of the fire, "Marion," I said, "how in the devil have you been? What have you been doing? How are—"

"How's Jenn these days, Jerry?" she asked me. Not cattily, or meanly, but because she wanted to know.

"I—I don't know. Haven't seen her yet. I just struck town today."

"I thought you were engaged?"

"I suppose we are, after a fashion."

"Then why all this?" She gestured vaguely.

"Dash it all, I wanted tonight with you, to talk with you!" I said. "I meant to spend it alone, but running into you like that.... Fate, and all that." She laughed at my intentionally trite expression.

So we talked. We could always talk splendidly, Marion and I. We yarned away for several hours. Naturally, I said nothing about my affliction, was forgetting it entirely, until she asked about the scars around my eyes. Then the whole tale came out. All by itself, you know. No volition on my part.

At first she thought I was drunk. Then I saw the clouds of doubt gathering behind her lovely eyes, and at last I stopped, realizing that I had just proven myself irrevocably mad in her eyes.

"Jerry," she faltered, after Id stared at her for a minute or two, and I could feel pain in her tones, "Jerry old fellow, this accident you mentioned...."

I stood up. I was terribly weary, bone-weary.

"Marion," I said, "I'm sorry. I'm going to get stinking. I'll drive you home."

She kissed me as I opened the car door for her at her apartment house. It seemed to me a sort of motherly, oh-you-poor-wounded-boy kiss. I shot back through town like a bat out of a furnace, and called Jenn.

While I waited for her I made myself some highballs. They were pretty average powerful ones. I was going to tell my story to Jenn. Twice in a night; pretty tough. But I had to see if Jenn would believe me. If she didn't—well, I was alone in a world of blind idiots and terrible, unimaginable beast-things.

Jenn had plenty of brains. Jenn was tall and dark and smooth and sleek, like a gorgeous great otter. Jenn wore clothes in the way every woman wishes she could. Jenn was the most beautiful object I had ever seen in my life. Marion was as lovely as a star, but Jenn was as stunning as a fiery comet.

There was a light tap on the door. I went over, weaving somewhat, and threw it open.

On the threshold stood a seven-foot globule of dusky orange, shot with sickly pink lights. There were some eyes on stalks, and some arms and things. I was getting pretty

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used to them by now. There was a beak. It opened.

"Hello, Jerry darling," said Jenn.

And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.
—King Henry VIII

AFTER I had gone to bed I lay awake and sweated. I shook and shuddered, the cold perspiration running over me, and I wondered: Now will *they* know? When I slammed that door in the Jenn-thing's face—"face!"—did I give the whole ruddy show away?

What will *they* do? Will they gather somewhere, a Ladies Home Sewing Circle, or a Literary Club, or a Smoker, or some other innocent assemblage, and discuss my fate?

Or....

Do *they* know one another? Can they tell who is one of the elect and who is a poor devil of an unsuspecting human being?

Of course they know. Hadn't I seen them talking to each other on shipboard, writhing their tentacles and mouthing unheard noises through orifices that substituted in them for mouths? And if through my freak accident I could see them, couldn't they naturally see one another? They were so obviously an alien race; *they* knew who was who!

And what would they do to me now?

Well, all they could have thus far was a suspicion. But certainly anything that looked like *they* did would have no compunction about liquidating one poor mortal, even if only on suspicion. There seemed little doubt that I was now in deadly danger.

It's often seemed to me that I was born in danger, grew up in constant danger, and have indeed known very few times when I wasn't in that precarious state. What with border wars in India, the blitz here, and various other fiascos, it's been a hectic life. But never, never did mortal man find himself in such a deadly, hideous danger as that in which I now wallowed.

Even if I wasn't known to them yet as a see-er, I soon would be unless I accustomed myself soon to going about among them with a straight face. I should have to deal with them, eat and drink with them, perhaps—God help me!—the nurse-thing had shown me that perhaps I should even have to make love to one of them. Either that or become a hermit. Or die. Or blind myself.

Yes, I even toyed with that notion!

Morning came at last, bringing no relief and no solution.

I arose and dressed wearily. My faculties were beginning to grow numb with the strain. I thought of going to Marion and retelling my story slowly, in the full light of day, slower this time, with more corroborating details.... But I had no corroborating details!

As I ran a comb through my hair there was a knock on my door. I went into the sitting room and put my hand on the knob. Then a thought struck me. Hastily I tiptoed to my closet, opened it, and removed the coat that matched my trousers. I also took a heavy topcoat and an almost-new felt hat which would stand a lot of hard wear. As the knock was repeated I slid silently into my bedroom and flung them on the bed. Bad luck throwing a hat on a bed? As if one more ounce of bad luck mattered to me!

From a drawer I selected my heaviest muffler. The knocking crescendoed through the flat. "Half a mo'," I shouted, trying to sound sleepy. "Just puttin' my trousers on."

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I laid the muffler and a pair of heavy leather gloves on the topcoat. From my dresser I took my compact little shaving kit and a few toilet articles. I crammed them all into the topcoat pockets. I got out my revolver, a heavy .45, and slipped it into my coat also, with the dozen rounds of ammunition I had left. Hastily, my hands shaking ever so slightly, I filled my old silver flask to the brim from a bottle of brandy I had fortuitously bought the day before; the bottle itself being too bulky to carry inconspicuously. I added a pair of heavy socks and a couple of handkerchiefs to the trove in my coat, and as a final item, the reason for which I could only dimly conceive, a small but fairly powerful pocket telescope.

Then, shouting something inane to pacify the waiter-at-the-door, I tore off my white shirt—literally tore it off, even though it was new—and as buttons went spinning about the floor I stuffed the ripped remains in a drawer and hustled myself into a good heavy flannel hunting shirt. Knotting a tie hurriedly, and giving a last swift glance at the things on the bed, I shut the bedroom door behind me and walked across the sitting room.

Taking a deep breath, I opened the door. Trying not to see what was there, I grinned. "Come in," I said.

They came in. There were three of them. With the closed door at my back I put everything I had into a hearty smile and stuck out my hand. It went through a blob of intangible yellow oozing stuff, but I didn't wince. I felt my hand shaken in a good tight grip.

CONCENTRATING harder than I ever had before, I stared without seeming to stare at the one who held my hand. I found that by momentarily forgetting the grisly shape of the creature I could see the man "inside" it pretty plainly. I had never tried to do it before. I recognized this one at once. It was Jack Kinkaid.

"Hallo, boy," I said.

"Cheero, Jerry!" said the Kinkaid-beast. "What, no khaki?"

"Oh, I'm out of the service, Jack," I said easily. "Accident, y'know. My eyes—"

I should never have let that slip. The great yellow monster turned quite orange with interest. "Oh, your eyes?" it said with deep surprise, either real or very well feigned.

"Yes," I said shortly. "Sit down, won't you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, old man. This is Bill Tregennis. And—" he mentioned some other prosaic name, but I didn't catch it.

"Tregennis?" I said. "Any relation to Jennifer?"

"Cousin," said the Tregennis-thing.

"Sit down," I said again, having nothing else to say. What does one say to three hydra-headed bogiemen?

I knew they'd come about Jenn. I knew she'd told her cousin at once, the night before, and here was the delegation to see what was up. On the human side, all well and good. Very natural that a girl's relative should come round to see the bounder of a fiance who had slammed a door in her face. And in its subtler implications? A select party of three of the monsters sent up by Lord knew what Central Council, to discover if there was danger from a possible slip somewhere....

Think how often it must happen! Think how many untoward accidents they must investigate! Think how they must be on guard every second

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against just such a freak as I'd become, one who could see them! Only think how many poor devils who've given way to some impulse without reason must be catechized by a pack of these evil spirits!

And now they had really found one who knew. I didn't dare let them discover that fact. But how in the world could I keep them from it?

I could only try.

"I have a vague recollection of being frightfully stinko last night and calling up Jenn," I smirked fatuously, giving them the man-to-man business. "I'm glad she didn't take me seriously."

"But she did," said the Tregennis ghoul. "She came up here."

"But, my word, she didn't," I protested.

"You slammed the door in her face. With a shriek," it added thoughtfully.

"Judas Priest, I must have been blotto," I said lamely.

"You must have been heartily blotto," agreed Kinkaid, standing in front of my mantelpiece. "I say, Jerry old thing, about your eyes...."

I TURNED to stare at him, and dropped headlong into the trap. Before my bulging eyeballs he puffed himself up, swelled, turned from yellow to a vivid scarlet, shot out tentacles to within an inch of my face, made his "mouth" a gaping scarlet well that led deep down into the flaming pits of Malebolge.

I am only human.

"Stop that!" I screamed. "Don't do that, you—"

The other two were on their feet at once. "Don't do what?" asked Kinkaid's big voice solicitously, while his actual shape subsided into its now-familiar yellow formlessness.

"Don't tap your foot like that," I said, thinking faster than I ever had on the battlefield. "I've got the great-grandfather of all mornings-after, laddie."

Naturally they were far from satisfied. I saw *them* speak to each other, waving their tentacles in excited colloquy, while the man-shapes stood and stared at me. They were preparing another test, of course. With all the calmness I could muster I got out of my chair and headed for the bedroom. One of them, I think the Tregennis-beast, came over and stood in my path. My hands turned cold and wet and my stomach contracted into a sick ball.

"Where are you going?" it asked.

I saw out of the tail of my eye the Kinkaid-thing speak sharply, if inaudibly, to my fiancee's cousin. Evidently it said, "Don't be so obvious, you idiot!" because Tregennis fell back rather disconcertedly.

"Goin' to fix myself a bromo," I said, as if surprised. "D'you mind?" I added, with sarcasm.

"Of course not, sorry," it muttered.

I went into the bedroom and tried to look as if I always closed the door behind me when I took a bromo. I put my fingers around the key and as slowly as possible—and with tremendous care to be silent—I turned it till it would turn no further.

I waited a second or two. I had no ideas then of the beasts' capabilities. I thought it distinctly possible that they might be able to see through wood. If they could, they'd be after me in a flash. Nothing stirred in the sitting room. I let out a sigh of relief.

Swiftly and smoothly I pulled on the coat. I put on the hat and then the muffler. I shrugged into the topcoat with its load of valuables,

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slid the silver flask into my inside pocket, and as quietly as I could I opened the window. It gave directly onto a fire escape. I climbed out.

Twenty steps down the rusting-iron stairway I suddenly recollected that in my top drawer was a considerable sum of money. I would need every cent I could get—I turned right around and flew back up the steps.

I could hear them talking in the next room. Then Kinkaid's voice, raised in query: "I say, Jerry, are you taking a bath in the stuff?"

"With you in a minute," I shouted, to cover the noise of my bureau drawer coming open. I grabbed the little stack of bills and hared out onto the fire escape again as the Tregennis-gorgon yelled something. I didn't stop to answer. I took the fire escape three steps at a time.

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream...
...the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.
—Julius Caesar

BY THE TIME my feet touched the alley I knew where I was going. There was no rhyme nor reason to my choice, it just popped into my head. I took a taxi, the second one I saw because the first was driven by one of *them*, and in a short time I was inside Charing Cross Station.

I sat down on one of the benches and then the situation really caught up with me. Shaking as though I had blackwater fever, I sat and moaned to myself. Finally I dragged into the men's room and took a long pull at my flask. Then I went back to the bench, somewhat revived.

So far, so good. Or at any rate, so far, so safe. I had given Kinkaid the slip; and besides him, the two monsters with him, Jenn, Marion, and perhaps a dozen people more or less, no one in London these days knew me from Methusaleh. But *they* would have discovered my getaway by now, and undoubtedly the hue and cry was on.

I sat there and watched the men and women and the beast-people shuffle past. I began to notice smaller things about them now that I was growing used to their eerie forms.

For one thing no two seemed to be made in the same pattern. Each one was an individual. Here was a monstrous snake-like being humping along, there ran a brown demon-toad all covered with red warts.

I've been using prosaic terms to describe them. That's because we have no words for what they really look like. When I say shark and spider and octopus and toad, I'm grasping at the nearest analogy I know. They don't honestly look like sharks and spiders, octopi and toads. They look like nothing on earth or in Hell. If there was suddenly a brand-new color, a new primary color, what would you call it, how would you describe it? It's the same way with these shapeless, nevertheless shaped things. They are literally indescribable.

The nearest approach I can make to a description is that they look like amoeba and protozoa gone wild. But that's not it either. They all seem to be able to throw out pseudopods or tentacles or what-have-you, but they always return to their own lovely shape afterward. I—I don't know. It's an awful job telling about them.

Another thing I noticed while I was sitting there. I could see a multitude of faint lines, running parallel to each other, stretching out from them for a short distance. These lines

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usually ran at an angle of about forty-five or fifty degrees, and were bluish-silver. I wondered about them for a long time. They didn't seem to change at all when the beast-things moved. They were always there, as a kind of background to the horrid shapes, running out into nothingness about two or two and a half feet from the body.

Background, that was the key word. I believe that the lines are a part of their dimension. The accident to my eyes had given me the range of these beings, these nightmares, but apart from the devils themselves I couldn't see into their dimension, if dimension it is. Excepting for these lines.

I THINK—if you'll excuse this theorizin' by a very unscientific mind—I think that the human bodies are the focal points of the beast-creatures, and that my warped vision could spot the hobgoblins only because of their connection with the human bodies. In other words, the body which the beast has either stolen, occupied, or been born into, is the focusing point between our dimensions. This other place, the one where they normally live, and which is composed so far as I could see of straight silver lines running at a tangent, is invisible to me even after the accident with the gun; only where a *thing* has usurped a human form can my eyes penetrate the curtain, veil, or barrier between our worlds, our dimensions.

Pretty steep, eh? I agree.

Put it that the force-field into which I could see, because of the thing's occupying a body in this world, extends only about three feet at most around said body. Thus I can see the monstrosity itself, and a little of its dimension (the silver lines), and then the veil thickens once more.

I wondered as I sat there in Charing Cross. I wondered what *they* are, and where they came from originally, and what their purpose is. Are they from another planet? I doubt it. It seems to me the most probable notion that they've always existed coincidental with us in this silver-lined plane of theirs.

When did they begin to break through? Did they only recently, as time goes, learn how to possess bodies? Did some accident a few generations ago gain them the key to our world? Or have they always been with us?

I wondered if they were malignant; or perhaps they were utterly harmless, and merely another life-form content to live among us as human beings? Are they perhaps only playing some intricate, hideous, cosmic joke?

All my instinct rose against such a theory. *They* are more malevolent than an insane cobra. *They* hate us. I could see the pulsing lights of hatred come and go in the Jenn-thing, in the Kinkaid-ogre, in the nurse-creature on board ship. Some long-dormant sense came back to me from the prehistoric days when we were struggling against the sabre-toothed cats, and I smelt hatred wafting from their grisly bodies like an effluvium, a noxious exhalation of evil.

I shook myself all over. Get a grip on yourself, Wolfe! I said. There is very little time (I felt that strongly) and there is a great deal to do.

What should be first?

I must organize against these monsters. So far as I knew I was the only living soul who could see *them*. I would have to guard my life as a thing more precious than riches and kingdoms and the hope of eternal salvation. I must get in touch with other chaps, good decent fellows like yourself, Alec, and old Tommie Killigrew and Algy What's-his-name who was a Leftenant with us at

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Dunkirk. I accepted sadly the fact that undoubtedly some of them would be *them.* But some were bound to be human. With a nucleus of soldiers and brave, intelligent men I might be able to do something.

If there were only some mark these cacodemons carried! I thought hastily of all the ones I knew thus far, and tried to recall their human physical peculiarities and draw some parallel between them. Perhaps a way of looking, or of thinking....I stuck on the memory of Jenn. Where else could you find so normal a woman, except for her superhuman beauty? And then Kinkaid was far from beautiful, so that canceled itself out.

Idly, for my mind would not bear too much hard thinking just then, I began to count the beast-folk who passed me on my bench. Then I took out a bit of paper, drew a line down its center, and began to make check marks on it: one here for a beast, one on the other side for a person, noting each as they passed me there on my bench.

I counted some two hundred before I stopped and averaged it up.

The ratio was about seven to six in favor of us. We were in the majority! It was my first hopeful discovery.

THEN I recollected that I hadn't seen any children. I concentrated my gaze on the milling mob of me and things, and in a moment I had the answer, or a part of it at least. The things that masqueraded as children were themselves the same size as their companions who occupied fully-grown bodies. By squinting I could see the toddling babies, the ten-year-olds romping at their mothers' sides, the adolescents. All of them were in actuality grown beast-things.

Horror-stricken, I took a pull at my flask regardless of who should see me. No children! *No children!*

So that was how they were taking us over. They got the children's bodies....

And then I saw a small boy walking toward an exit with a man and a woman.

A small boy. A real, honest-to-goodness little boy.

So they hadn't got all our progeny yet!

A man came along talking animatedly, though inaudibly to me in the midst of the roar of the station, to his wife, who was a sort of misshapen grey toad. A thing trailed along at the man's side, and the boy-form I could dimly see within it held tight to its "father's" hand.

That happened twice: a man, a thing-wife, and a child-thing.

Then I saw another child, a girl, pigtailed and frocked, with a man and a woman.

I began to ferret out the answer.

A man marries a creature, one of the otherworlders. They spawn a creature.

Or a woman is yoked, unknowing, with one of the beastly chimera-beings in male form. They have beasts also.

Apparently like begets like, and the beasts cannot be born into our dimension unless one of the parents is a usurper, one of *them.*

How they started to infiltrate I can't guess; but it seems plain to me that now they come "in" by route of birth. Perhaps a cursed freak accident generations ago let in one of them, and he put his foot in the door....

So now the things must somehow open the way to others of their kind by having children, who are born not as real children but as shells or

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husks occupied by the gorgons; unless my observations, scanty as they were, led me to a wrong conclusion. I did see a man and a woman with a beast crawling along after them, but it occurred to me that adoption or even minding-the-neighbors'-kid would explain that.

So that's how they are gathering. My mind flew then to Marion and how the Jenn-thing had seduced me from my love subtly. Of course! They want all the beasts they can smuggle in!

Well, no matter. I must take thought for myself and the morrow, or rather the extremely present present. I had begun to forget that I was in deadly danger.

Where should I go? Out of London, into the countryside until the hue and cry died down. Then a return, disguised, perhaps wearing a beard, and the work of enlisting my forces would begin.

I went up to a ticket window. There was a beast-thing behind the grille. I murmured something about forgetting my wallet and walked away. I felt horribly conspicuous until I remembered that every day hundreds of people act very oddly indeed and *they* must have grown used to it by now.

My danger would begin when word was passed to *them* by Jenn and Kinkaid. Perhaps they had some superhuman agency of contact? Perhaps word had gone out already?

I spotted a man at a ticket window and went up to it. I bought a ticket for a distant station in Cornwall. In a few minutes I was alone in a first-class compartment on the train, gathering speed and drawing away from the scene of my primary danger.

On horror's head horrors accumulate!
—Othello

ABOUT FORTY miles from London my compartment door slid open and what to anyone else would have been a man in a railway guard's uniform entered.

"We have just received a wire," said the hole in the middle of its writhing cluster of jaws, while the green eyes in its chest region stared at me speculatively. "It comes from a Mister Kinkaid..."

Kinkaid must have contacted every train out of London! Hysteria, a mad kind of silly panic, took me by the throat; I giggled in its face. "Yes?" I said.

"It seems there has been an accident," went on the creature, sliding the compartment door to behind it. "Your eyes—"

I was just sane enough in that terrible moment to remember to squint. Otherwise, in firing at the monster, I might have missed the man-form altogether, and thrown away my chance. I slung a shot into the middle of the railway guard's belly, jumped for the opposite side of the compartment as it lunged at me, and put another slug into the human head at a range of approximately fourteen inches.

It was the most uncanny thing in the world, watching the beast die out of our world. My bullets hadn't hurt *it* in the slightest, of course. But its human focal point was dying, and it was being forced back into its own silvery-lined dimension. The man slumped to the floor, twisted and gurgled something. The beast-thing stood upright so that the solid human shape made a kind of dark puddle at its base. I saw the edges and the ends of the tentacles start to dissolve slowly, then the entire monster swam and shimmered in my vision. As it clung tenaciously to existence in my world, its color

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strengthened for a minute; then the life force oozed out and the great creature faded like the Cheshire Cat until only its green eyes, hateful and wicked beyond measure, were left. Then they too were gone.

I had destroyed the point of contact. That was all. Naturally I didn't feel in the slightest like a murderer. I had stopped the processes of a kind of puppet, without life of its own; and had driven back into its own demonic dimension a monster from never-never land.

Waking to my surroundings suddenly, I realized that we had been thundering through a tunnel for some minutes; and probably my shots had not been heard by anyone in the increased roaring of the engine. I opened the window of my compartment. I picked up the empty hull of the railway guard and eased it onto the sill, collected my strength and shoved it over into echoing blackness and oblivion.

One down, how many millions to go?

Vainly I wished for a cloak of invisibility, which would allow me to go about the world slaughtering these invaders—but even if I had forty years of life left, what percentage of them could I evict, as it were, before my own death? I might set their progress back a decade or two, but I alone could never hope to eliminate them entirely. I would need a small army for that.

Yes, said I ironically to myself, and every man equipped with an invisible cloak. Why not wish for an invincible sword while you're at it?

I curled up on the seat as comfortably as I could. I had seen a number of railway guards and they'd all been human. I felt fairly safe over that telegram. It had probably been a secret one, to the defunct monster only. One telegram to each train, likely each to a known beast-thing.

A thought brought me to my feet involuntarily. What if the creature I'd banished from our world could communicate with others of his kind who still had their points of contact, their bodies? It was a horrible thought. In that case I had released a fiend for active duty against me. The chances were, I thought optimistically, that he couldn't see into my dimension now any more than I could see into his without a focal point of weakening in the veil; but he could likely—almost surely—talk with others of his kind who were half in one world and half in the other.

I must get off the train immediately. Once out of this compartment and the things would be at a loss to find me. My description might even now be circulating through the silver-lined plane, but I look like a hundred thousand other Englishmen. Any identification by strangers would be a tentative, uncertain thing (except for the scars about my eyes, which were invisible at more than two feet), and the beasts couldn't very well start on a reign of terror merely to eliminate one man. That would tip their hand.

We were racing through a countryside of rolling hills, braes, little brooks and peace; in the distance I could see a wood.

My window was still open. I put on my overcoat and pulled my felt hat low and tight over my forehead. I checked my precious little stock of possessions, and dropped my gun into an outside pocket.

THE DOOR slid open once again. I might have been growing used to the beings by now or I might not

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have been. At any rate, here was the damndest of them all. It rose to the roof, a seven-foot presence as slim and supple as a willow tree, and over its entire surface were thorns, spines, buds, warts, embryonic tentacles, nodules, tumors, wens, blisters, boils, bits of fungi, knobs, snags, peaks, and in short, every sort of protuberance one could imagine; there were no long tentacles, no eyes, nothing but the prickly, bumpy surface. It was a new piece of goods to me entirely.

And yet, it didn't scare me one-tenth so much as the usual chimeras did. It was simply so far removed from any human analogy I could make that it was unbelievable.

I peered closely into its heart and saw a woman, dressed in a neat grey suit. She spoke, her voice a soft husky murmur.

"Mind if I come in?"

"One moment," I said evenly, surprising myself enormously by my coolness. "I presume you've heard from our late lamented comrade, the railway guard?"

The woman gave me a look of pretty surprise, but the bogieman gave the show away by turning green and quaking with wrath. So it had been told! My sudden premonition had proved correct.

My .45 came out of my pocket at the same instant her pearl-handled popgun appeared from her purse. Closing my eyes till they were slits, I put a slug squarely between her pretty eyes.

The prickly willow shaft flashed crimson and went out like a stepped-on cigarette. A pearl-handled revolver clattered on the floor.

I threw a leg over the window sill, grabbed the frame, followed the first leg with the second, held my breath and leaped as far out as I could from the standing start. I hit the embankment and rolled like a shot hare, over and over, my face pillowed in my arms and my whirling body as relaxed as nerve and determination could make it.

I brought up at the foot of the high bank, and lay still a second or two to feel if I were injured. By the favor of heaven I was not; my fall had scuffed my shoes and put a rent in my coat, little more. I jumped to my feet and dashed away for the horizon.

Apparently my leap for life had gone unnoticed, for the train was rapidly vanishing into the distance. I continued to put the tracks behind me until I had covered perhaps two miles; then I slowed up and straightened myself out into the semblance of an ordinary countryman out for a stroll through the hills. Occasionally in the hours that followed I would lie up on a hill and scan the fields with my pocket telescope for signs of pursuit. There were none.

By evening I had found a little inn, one of the ancient British order of taverns which lie on the outskirts of forests and seem to have been there since before Caesar's legions were tramping the moors and heaths. Everything about it was old and solid and wonderfully human.

I went in the door, ducking my head to miss the low lintel, and looked about me with the feeling that if there were beast-things in this homely place I would go out into the wood and shoot myself through the head.

Behind the desk sat a wizened old lady, prim and antique in her high-necked purple dress. A very old man was dusting the furniture in a pottery fashion, and two chaps who could have been nothing but retired Colonels reclined in deep chairs with

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tall glasses at their elbows and read *Punch*.

I had discovered a sanctuary and haven of blessed prosaic normality. In ten minutes I was seated in one of the deep armchairs, a hot rum inside me and a copy of the Times, four days old, spread out on my lap. The promise of a thundering good roast beef dinner came wafting out of the kitchen to my twitching nostrils. I was home.

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold.
—A Midsummer-Night's Dream

I STAYED at that inn nearly four days before *they* discovered me.

It was a scandalous luxury, to appropriate all that time to myself when I may have been the destined savior of mankind from the beast-folk; but I could not have left that wonderful place sooner to save my immortal soul. By the fourth day it was as though my dealings with *them* had been the most horrendous sort of nightmare, very real while it was happening, but growing more nebulous hour by hour in the glow of the hearth-fire and the peaceful mild boredom of the old men's conversation.

One of them—he turned out to be a retired Colonel, just as I had surmised—was named Bedford. He was one of your real Blimps, stuffy and repetitious, but obviously a man who could be brave to the point of idiocy. We had served in the same Indian towns and stations, though thirty years apart, and in four days we were blood brothers and rapidly becoming inseparable.

I came downstairs on the fourth day champing the bit at thought of bacon and eggs for breakfast, and there at the desk talking to the wisp of a proprietress was a beast-thing. My eyes flew open in amazed incredulity, so far had my thoughts been from *them*, and the heavy country accent came incredibly to my ears from the pulsing monstrosity.

"'E's 'ereabouts, mum, that's certain...."

I backtracked silently to my room and was bolting myself in when a far better thought struck me. Pausing only to collect my gear, I flew to Colonel Bedford's room and let myself in without knocking.

"Listen, Colonel," I said without preamble, though his eyebrows shot up to the roots of his hair at such presumption on the part of a mere ex-Captain, no matter how good a friend, "I'm in a hell of a jam."

He sat down and motioned me to go on.

"I can't begin to tell you about it, because you'd think I was dotty (he made negative motions with his hand), but I'll tell you this: I've done absolutely nothing wrong, he nodded, naturally an officer does nothing wrong, his face said) but they're after me, and it's vital —I can't tell you how vital —that they don't catch me. It's more important than anything else in the world right now, not only to me, but to England herself." I was going to say mankind, but didn't, for that would have sounded plain silly.

"What can I do?" he asked at once. Bless him!

"There's a man downstairs looking for me now. I think he may be a constable. But he's wrong, all wrong, and I'm right. And I've got to get away."

"Take my car," he said coolly.

"Thanks," I said. "Here's two hundred quid—pay the bill here for me and keep what's left for the car in case I lose it. And now listen close-

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ly. If you haven't heard from me in, say, ten days, go up to London. I ask you this favor as one Indian officer to another. Go to the Gloucester Club and ask for me; if I'm not there, get hold of Alec Talbot, or Geoffrey Exeter, or chaps called Warwick and Salisbury. I don't know, I haven't seen them in years, they may all be dead. In that case I'm afraid there's nothing for it but to give up and forget the whole affair. But if I can do it I'm going to get back there and find one or two of them and, with luck, tell them my yarn. They'll tell it to you, if they're —well, if they're alive, and the right sort of chaps."

"Names again?" he barked, whipping out a pencil and a scrap of paper.

"Talbot, Exeter, Warwick, Salisbury. Or you might try Will Chester. I'll do my best to get to one of them before I'm snagged. It's a wild tale, Colonel, but I assure you on my honor as a gentleman that it's true." I hoped I was taking the right line with him. I was.

"Car's in front now," said Bedford, not turning a hair at such lawlessness. "I'll go down and engage this chappie while you get down the ivy." He gestured toward the window, shook my hand briefly, and popped out like a ten-year-old going to a party.

THE IVY, a thick, tangled, ages-old mass of black strong stuff, was evidently intended by Nature for a ladder. I hand-over-handed it down, dropped the final eight feet, took six bounds to reach the front of the inn, saw that the coast was clear and shot into the Colonel's little two-seater as fast as I could go. The starter baulked for a moment, my hair rose on end as I jammed and jiggled and fumed, and then I was off with a roaring whoosh.

I had gone a couple of miles along the rutted road through the wood before the other car appeared in my mirror. I cursed savagely at myself for forgetting to put it out of commission. It overhauled me rapidly—Bedford's little motor made heavy going of this rotten road—and soon my enemy was drawing level with me.

A green dragon leaned out of the window and shouted at me.

" 'Ere, now, sir, pull over there, I want a talk with you!" it bellowed. I squinted and it was, indeed, a constable. I drove with my left hand and took out my revolver with my right. I fired at him and swore at the bounding little auto that spoiled my aim. I fired again and my second shot drew blood. The green dragon turned violet with fury.

"There, you dirty dragon!" I screeched tauntingly. I knew I would kill this beast, at least relegate it to its own world once more, and I couldn't resist letting it know I was really the freak its foul crew were all searching for. "How do you like that lead, you grisly nightmare?"

I leveled my gun and slanted my eyes narrowly. I put a shot into the chest of the human puppet and saw with vast satisfaction that the monster was growing filmy. Its automobile swerved and crashed headlong into a tree. I settled myself quite happily for a long drive.

In a couple of hours I struck the outskirts of London. I put up the Colonel's two-seater at a garage, gave his name and address as though they'd been my own, and said that I'd probably be back in two or three days, but that if I wasn't they were

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to drop me a line. Then I caught a tram for Piccadily Circus.

I PROPPED myself up against the corner of a building, trying to look like a reformed con man who had come upon evil days; I hadn't yet shaved that morning and I thought my performance was pretty fair. I stuck a cigarette in the corner of my mouth, held it limply between my lips, didn't light it, turned up my collar and pulled my now-battered felt hat rakishly across one eye. I doubted whether even the Kinkaid-fiend would recognize me. But I kept one hand on my .45....

Alec, old friend, if you could see what I saw that morning! The bustling throngs of people, all so pitifully unknowing, so innocently unaware of the concourse of ghouls, basilisks, triple-headed monsters, demogorgons, and hobgoblins of every description that brush by them every second of their lives! It was horrible, it wrenched one's soul into a tight knot. What could I do? What could I, the only mortal on earth who knew our danger, do toward warning humanity of its deadly danger? Nothing. No matter to whom I told my story, no matter how many believed me, what could they do with no method of telling the men from the beast-folk! Through no fault of my own, I was the most hopeless, the most incompetent savior of mankind imaginable.

The worst of it all came when I concentrated on seeing the humanoid puppets within the beasts. So many of them were young, handsome, eager chaps...so many were pretty girls...

Almost all the Piccadilly Commandoes, as we used to call them, are of the beast-people. So very many are alien beings from the silvery dimension which lies next to ours....

I stood there, thinking futilely, for about an hour. Then I went into a restaurant and had myself a jolly good meal. If I was going to die in the next few hours, I'd do it on a full stomach.

I then started walking toward the Club.

And ran into the Jenn-demon before I'd gone a hundred yards.

I WHIPPED into a doorway, but it saw me. It cried something, and I raced like a miler back toward the Circus. People—and *they*—halted to stare after me; this would never do. I slowed up, walking briskly but sanely. Then I heard the clamor grow, and dived through a swinging door into a pub. I sought the men's room, locked myself in, and hauled my body up to the window set high in the dirty grey wall. For a second I teetered there, while my fingers worked madly at the bolt, then it was open and I was dragging the window up. An alley, deserted and lonely, met my thankful gaze. Leaving the window open behind me, for the locked door would ultimately give me away, I ran down the alley to its furthest end, where it debouched into a narrow street. Here things were quiet, and I walked swiftly up toward town.

For hour after hour I walked, uncertain at times where I was, slipping into doorways and up side streets every few minutes with all the panic of the fugitive tearing at my soul. Unreasoning terror at times would run a few steps until sanity forced me into a walk again. It was a mad day, a very mad day in a very mad world.

Sometime about dusk I saw the headlines.

"Insane Killer Seen In London!"

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"Jeremy Wolfe In Piccadilly Circus!"

"Cold-blooded Murderer of Three Still at Large!"

And much more of the same. The beast-folk had done their work surpassingly well.

I took a room in a house in a dingy district, shaved, slept for a few hours; and in the cold fog of dawn crept out into the streets, a man with a price on my head, a modern Robin Hood who had killed the villains to save the good people and found himself a doomed and hunted man for it.

About ten o'clock they cornered me. I was sitting on a bench in a park near the Club, getting up my nerve to come and find a friend to help me, when I was spotted. *They* came after me hotfoot, a dozen of them, to most eyes a handful of bobbies and plain citizens; I dropped one of them to give the others pause, and fled for my life.

Dashing across a street some little distance in advance of my pursuers, I managed to jump on the rear step of a two-decked bus as it passed between them and me. Fortunately there was plenty of traffic. I went up to the top and sat down, breathing heavily. I rode ten blocks and got off, went into a cinema and fidgeted through two hours or so of film that I didn't see, while outside the hue and cry came and passed up the streets. Then, fearful and cringing, I left the shelter of the theatre and made my way cautiously and by devious routes to the Club. I asked for you, seeing no one whom I had known in the old days and praying that you'd be around. Praise heaven, you were.

And here I am. Apparently no one's noticed me thus far, and from your warm reception, Alec, I know you've not seen the papers. But sooner or later someone who's heard of the business will spot me, and I'll be on my merry way once more. At any rate, I've got my yarn out at last. Now, if I've got to be scragged, well, there'll be someone who'll know I'm not a cold-blooded murderer or an insane fiend...

I pass'd, methought, the melancholy flood,
With that grim ferryman which poets write of,
Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.
King Richard III

WE WERE silent then, Jerry and I, for the length of time it might have taken to count thirty. I stared at the dud bomb's track in the east wall.

"You're right, old man," I said then, "I haven't seen a paper in days."

"They're full of horrid bad stuff," he said. He had nearly finished the bottle of Scotch, but it hadn't touched him. His voice was as even, as sane and cool, as it had been years ago in the hell of Dunkirk when he'd knelt beside me and helped to lift my brother's body from the mud. His scarred eyes were sunken and reddened at the rims, but they were neither wild nor vicious, as a true killer's would have been.

"We've got to hide you, laddie," I told him, shaking just a trifle with suppressed excitement. "They'll check the Club, that's certain. What about my digs?"

"If there's time. You know, old chap," he said, a faint grim grin touching his haggard features, "I rather feel the sands runnin' out. I doubt that we make your place."

"Rot."

"No, no, it was miraculous that I came past the doors without being spotted. And I'm tired, suddenly, more tired than I've ever been. I think I'm done."

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"Good Lord, man, who's to save us if you're taken?"

He gave me an indescribable look of mingled friendship and quizzical inquiry. "You believe my yarn?"

"Yes," I said without hesitation. "I believe it. From any other man, I don't know...but I believe it."

His answer was a handclasp that gripped like a bulldog's jaws.

"Oh, maybe it's partly because I'm bored to death, and feel myself rusting away, here on the shelf," I went on. "And maybe it's because I'd welcome a good stiff fight to go out in, me havin' this missing flipper and not knowing anything but how to drill men and make war; but I think it's mostly because no man in the world could dream up a yarn like that and tell it so straight if it weren't at least partially true!"

"Good old scout," said Jerry fervently.

"Finish that glass," I told him, "and then we'll smuggle you out of here and up to my place. After that we can check on some of the other chaps who might—"

"Oh, God," said Jerry suddenly, in a low groaning voice. "Look there."

In the archway between the "mausoleum" and the library stood seven or eight men in plain clothes who couldn't have been more obviously detectives if they'd had "Scotland Yard" tattooed on their foreheads. With them were three P.C.s, looking around the library curiously and cautiously.

Jerry Wolfe ducked down behind me so that his face was hidden.

"For gosh sakes, boy, don't be so dam' conspicuous," I hissed.

"*They*," he muttered. "It's *they*. Listen to me, Alec."

"But, Jerry," I began.

"No, listen. I'm done, their system's too good. But I'm leaving you to carry on. Figure out your own method, but somehow, Alec old son, *fight them!* Get yourself some allies, and smash back at the beasts!"

"How?" I hissed frantically. "How, Jerry?"

"Your problem now, Alec. Listen. There's Will Chester in the corner, snoozin' away. He's all right. And a minute ago Geoff Exeter passed us, and he's human. You can trust them. And Colonel Bedford, when he gets in touch with you."

"But—" I said. They were coming slowly toward us in their methodical search.

HE SAT up and turned his head slightly away so that his face would be invisible to them. "No, no time. Not now, nor ever again. Chester, Exeter, Bedford. I leave you the three. Tell them. Make them believe you. And one of you take the chance. As I did."

"You mean, powder?"

"Yes, duplicate my experience. It's a million million to one against it, but laddie, I think you'll do it. If one fails, another must try. I tell you, it's our only chance! The race's only chance of survival. And when you can see them, be careful. Be cautious as I was not cautious. Be guileless and face up to them with a grin. And begin the fight for me, as I cannot. Get the same doctor I had, Baringer, John Baringer. He's all right. That'll be five of you. And I'd forgotten Marion Black! Make her believe now, Alec. She must. She'll make six."

"We can still get out—"

"We can't. I'm a dead man." He took his hand out of his pocket and there was a heavy revolver in it. "I'll make my stand here."

Without relevance I said inanely, "I've got a tremendously long lifeline, you know. Reaches all around

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my hand. I put a lot of faith in that."

"Alec, Alec, listen. I'll be dead in three minutes and the second sight is on me. Remember my Irish great-grandmother! I see you winning. I see a long, horrible, uphill struggle such as the world has never known. But I see you leading us back to the light." His voice, low almost to a whisper, was as eerie in those words as an old crone's mumbling over a gypsy fire. "I see a time when the ratio is not seven to six, but seven to three, or two, or one....Get into politics, one of you: that will count for us. Strike in the dark. Hire murderers. Corrupt judges. Kill them, kill them, kill them! Send them back to their own silver land where they belong. Control births. Establish—"

"Trust me," I said. The policemen had turned and were coming toward us from the other end of the library. Jerry held his gun against his chest and continued.

"I believe that there are others who can see. *Their* fright over me is too frantic; I'm not the first. Find the others!"

"If I live, I'll do it."

"You'll live, old man. You'll do it."

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said a man in a brown suit, stopping beside us. "But 'ave you seen—"

Jerry drove him back gasping with a slamming left in the midriff. He leapt across the room, not to the door, but to the east wall. Standing against the dud's scar, firm and tall as a Sergeant-Major on parade, he began to drop them as they rushed him. He got three before their first answering shot barked out. Then bullets hit him everywhere; in the legs, the chest. He weaved and fell, firing his final shot from his knees.

I shoved through the detectives and policemen. I knelt beside him, looking into his eyes.

"Crazy, sir," gasped a constable, dripping blood. "Clean mad-dorg crazy, this 'un were."

"He was talking to you," said a plain-clothes fellow, looking at me very queerly indeed. "What did he say, sir?"

"Some wild rambling yarn," I said, biting my lip. "He was obviously mad, as your man says."

"He's killed at least four people sir," the fellow went on, "besides our boys here. We'll want your evidence later on. Will you—"

"I'll swear that he was crazy as a March hare," I said slowly. "No two of his words made sense."

"Thank you, sir," said the man, satisfied.

Kneeling there, I looked into Wolfe's eyes. They held surprise and shock and unutterable pain. Slowly I slid my hand up my chest to my throat where no one but Jerry could see it.

With a faint, a very faint wink, I thrust up two fingers in the old V-for-Victory signal of the war. He grinned through the pain, his blue eyes cleared, and he let out his breath and died.

I stood up straighter than I'd stood since I lost my arm. I turned and pushed through the mob, walking slowly and surely and a little proudly toward the door. I had an overwhelming sense of a tremendous responsibility that was now mine, all mine. I had a job to do, a very big job indeed.

There are only four men and a girl to help me. Six human beings to fight against the usurpers. ...And yet, now there will be seven. Yes, you too know the story—the truth. There is a world to fight and to conquer. But I think we will do it.

I think we will do it...

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BEAUTY and the MACHINE

★ By Carter T. Wainwright ★

A QUESTION that has been answered in the last twenty years is this: can a machine be beautiful? And the answer is yes! Lately the subject of modern design has been widely discussed in industry and applied science. It is even creeping into everyday conversation. And it is about time. Why shouldn't everyday, useful things be beautiful—as well as useful. Must a thing be ugly because it is to be used? Are only works of art and architecture to have the word "beautiful" applied to them?

If you will notice the difference between common everyday things, like automobiles, motors, tools, houses, utensils, appliances, and if you will compare them with the same things manufactured twenty years ago, you at once see an amazing thing. What was once ugly, has become attractive to look at. This is entirely apart from the utilitarian efficiency of those which of course has improved infinitely. We're speaking of the aesthetic appearance, of the lines and appeal, not the mechanical or electrical aspects. When this concern over attractive design began, the immediate answer of the designer who was sick of silly curly-cews and gingerbread spread all over a machine in an effort to decorate it in the Victorian fashion, was to simplify it into an uncompromising cube or sphere wherever possible and to break its severe lines with a generous quantity of "gingerbread substitute"—i. e., chromium. In most modern design this horrible tendency has been gotten away from. The only major exception is the automobile, which still looks like a freakish, glittering piece of metal. Here the designer has run into a weird public taste which confuses streamlining suitable for airplanes with power, and demands *that*, along with gleaming chromium and stainless steel gew-gaws, to give the impression of luxuriousness. Of course such an attitude is ridiculous and silly but only time and education can change it.

In many other things however, public taste has coincided with, and been educated to, sensible attractive aesthetic principles. Just examine the average electrical appliance. It is truly an attractive thing—as well as a functional thing. The same can be said for the design of tools ranging from the lathe and milling machine to the hammer and the hand-drill. These things evolved into their present pleasing shape because first, they are functional, that is, they are designed to perform a duty, and only secondly because the designer judiciously employed a-line or a curve here and there.

One look at a modern rocket or airplane convinces us that utilitarian design is the real answer. It provides its own beauty. Thus, an airplane or a rocket is designed not with beauty in mind but purely with function—the result is a beautiful thing! The early designers tended to take the beauty of streamlining from its natural environment, the airplane and the submarine, and fitted it to the automobile and the vacuum cleaner which do not require it. The result is horrible. But only the automobile these days seems to be marred by that type of deformity. We no longer try and streamline kitchen appliances. We've learned how senseless such a practice is.

Examples of ancient sculptor, pottery and other artwork, shows an amazing understanding of this idea. Design a thing to work best, to perform its basic function—and automatically, that thing will look right, will seem charming and beautiful. Everyday people make that discovery when they look over certain old fashioned things. It may be a chair, or it may be a spoon. They look at it and say "why, that's beautiful." And it is. Much of our trouble stemmed from the beginning of the Industrial Age when machine designers weren't content to build machines. They felt that they had to be decorated and ornamented with curlicues and flowers, with twining hearts, and drooping flowers—else they were "ugly". Well we haven't fully recovered from this aborted sense of taste, but we're gradually rising above it. The reaction which swung the world to streamlining everything from the bathroom sink to the oil furnace was almost as bad. Now we've adopted the middle course.

The next few decades will gradually show this improvement on a grand scale. It is already evident in factories and many public buildings which are no longer built to look like Greek temples. It is evident in many things like the appliances, homes, buses, trains, airplanes, we discussed before. But it is not evident in automobiles, yet. There are a few examples of good car design, but for the most part the expression used in *Harper's* still holds—"Those big, fat, cars." We're in the atomic age all right, but our common carrier, the automobile never did get out of the horse and buggy stage. Oh, well, there's hope for the future; things can't look that bad forever!

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The MAN WHO COULD NOT DIE

By LEE FRANCIS

Voices pounded in Larry Stern's mind and he tried desperately to find peace in death—but that doorway was closed to him!

THE CARD room behind the night club was clouded with smoke. Some of it was rich and blue—some, gray and rancid smelling. It drifted upward into the bright light that hung above the table. The faces grouped around the circular white table looked like ghost faces. They seemed, in the bright light, to float without bodies beneath them.

The dealer sat with his small, green felt pad before him. His was the most human face of all. There was color in his cheeks. He flipped the cards across the table. The eyes in the faces followed each card as it spun out and landed face down. Five players—ten reaching hands. Some of them were slim fingered, some chubby. One pair of hands shook as they moved about above the table.

The man with the dirty gray stubble on his face said;

"I'll open."

He tossed a blue chip out so it rolled around a complete circle and dropped in the middle of the table. The others followed. The man with the dirty stubble looked sick.

He looked as though he was seeking rest, and couldn't find it. He didn't take any more cards. When the game went on again, he said;

"I'll check."

Larry Stern, sitting at his right, tossed in a blue chip.

"Playing hard to get?" Stern wanted to know.

The chips rolled in. It came around to the man with the stubble. His smile was almost crafty.

"Now I know where the power is," he said. "Raise ten bucks."

Someone groaned. Another player tossed in his cards. Three men met his raise. Stern raised him twenty bucks. The man with the stubble said;

"Back to you."

It went around a few times like that. Finally another man dropped. Three players stayed in the game. Stern kept meeting the raise, and adding another twenty bucks. One face drifted upward from the table, and in the dim light, a body gathered below it. The outside door opened, and the cold air came in from the alley. Now there was one man in the middle. Finally the man with the gray stubble got frightened. He said;

"I'll see it."

"You don't want any more raises?"

There was a challenge in Larry Stern's voice.

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He stepped into the path of the speeding car and felt his leg catch under the heavy wheel. But in the background he seemed to hear a deep laughter

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"I said I'll see your cards," the man with the stubble snapped.

Larry Stern layed out four kings in a neat row. The man with the gray stubble didn't say anything. He tossed his cards face down on the table and stood up. He went out through the open door and stood in the alley. He looked up the narrow canyon of office buildings, up at the sky. Never was there such misery on the face of a human.

Behind him, the dealer picked up the cards, stole a look at the losing hand and added them into the deck. The dealer suppressed a whistle. The man with the gray stubble had had four queens.

HE STOOD in the alley for ten minutes. He seemed to forget the game. He just stood still with his arms hanging at his sides. All the emotion was gone from his face.

Five thousand dollars in three hours. Five thousand that might have solved so many things. He turned and looked back into the game room. The smoke seemed to hit him in the face. The room smelled bad. He put both hands into his pockets and went inside. He stood behind the heavy set figure of Larry Stern. Stern half turned, saw him, and said;

"Sitting in next hand, Paul?"

The man with the stubble shook his head.

"I'm broke."

Stern tossed some chips on the table, and without looking back, said;

"I'll lend you something."

"Couldn't use it."

Everything was quiet for a time. Three hands went around. Stern won two of them. They were both big pots.

"You're doing pretty good," Paul said.

"I always do pretty good."

Stern sounded irritated.

"I'll say you do. How about a side bet?"

It was late. Everyone was tired. A voice said;

"I'm down a lot of dough. Shut up, you guys."

Paul didn't seem to hear.

"I'm going to shoot myself, Larry," he said.

He didn't give the speech any dramatic touch. He just said the words over slowly, as though he wasn't sure why he was talking aloud.

The room was very quiet. Somehow even the flip of the cards were loud against the eardrums. Hands kept gathering the cards in. Larry Stern laughed.

"What kinda flowers you want at the funeral?"

He meant for it to sound funny. It didn't. The dealer frowned.

"Okay," Paul said. "I'm going to shoot myself. I'll make you a side bet."

Stern whirled half out of his chair, facing the stubbled face.

"You're drunk, or crazy," he snarled. "Get the hell out of here. Go home and sleep it off."

Paul didn't move.

"I'll make you a side bet," he said again.

The dealer was waiting for them to settle it. He said;

"Cut out the funny stuff. This is no place for it."

"Never mind him," Stern said. "He hasn't any more dough. So, I'll make him a side bet anyhow. It won't be anything new, him owing me money."

Paul laughed. It wasn't a very happy, or even a human laugh.

"Cut the cards," he said. "If I win, I get my cash back."

"And if you lose?" Stern asked.

"I'll send back my ghost to serve you. I'll come back and do anything you want me to, I'll be your servant, for keeps."

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"This is the talk of fools," the dealer thought. *"Still, these men are no fools."*

"Okay?" Paul asked.

Stern shrugged. He had to get rid of the crazy fool before he started yelping his head off. He might lose some dough. So what? He was way ahead.

"You're nuts, Paul," he said.

"So I'm nuts. You got the courage to try?"

"It isn't a matter of courage. It's a matter of losing good dough to a drunken crack-pot."

Paul's voice snapped out like a whip.

"Does your past experience with me indicate that I'm a crack-pot?"

Larry Stern seemed actually to cringe for a moment. He shook his head a little and grinned at the terse faces around him.

"Come on," a voice said. "Get it over with, one way or another."

Stern took the deck of cards from the dealer. He shuffled the cards, watched them cut, and picked up half the deck. He turned over a Jack. Paul turned over a ten-spot.

Stern chuckled. It was a cracked, unhappy sound.

"Go home and sober up," he said. "You're licked, no matter how you look at it."

Paul turned slowly and went out the door. He didn't look back. He moved swiftly, as though he had an appointment and couldn't waste time.

THE LETTERING ON the office door read;

LAWRENCE STERN,
PRESIDENT

Jeff Fellows pushed the door open and went in. Fellows was tall, rather thin, dressed neatly in gray. His face had an eagerness, almost a sadness about it that made most people pity him. There was no reason to pity Fellows.

He crossed the room and seated himself before the desk. He crossed his legs, smoothed the crease in his trousers, and smiled at Stern.

"That was a rugged poker game last night."

"Not for me," Stern said, and grinned. "I picked up eight thousand bucks. Better than working. I suppose you need money this morning?"

Fellows shrugged.

"Always need dough," he admitted. "But that isn't why I came in. Paul Warner made a side bet with you last night."

Stern swore.

"Don't remind me of that damned fool. It isn't enough that he fights with everyone at the plant. Now he's put me on the spot. He's all done. He's fired before he comes in."

"Softly, softly," Fellows said. "You're speaking ill of the dead."

Stern came to his feet, fists clenched.

"Is this your idea of a joke?"

Fellows' grin was unpleasant. He shrugged.

"No harm done," he said soothingly. "I never liked Paul Warner any better than you did. However, sticking to vital statistics, Warner died last night in his apartment. Died of a bullet in the head."

Stern's eyes were narrow, but he said nothing.

Fellows stood up and leaned across the desk.

"Look," he said, "be kind to me. After all, I'm just about your son-in-law. I wouldn't lie to my own Pappy, would I? Besides that, you took only a couple hundred bucks from me last night. You cleaned Warner out of every dime he had in the world."

He stopped talking, looked very

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thoughtful, and added slyly.

"Maybe he *can* help you out better dead than alive. Remember that promise he made, to come back and be your servant? Guess he wasn't kidding. It wouldn't be so bad, having a nice ghost around to..."

"Shut up," Stern sank back into his chair. "You're trying to rub it in and you're doing a good job of it. You hate my guts, and I hate you. As for that damned rotten joke Warner played on me, forget it. Warner was drunk. He'd say anything."

Fellows turned his back on Stern and went slowly to the door. Before he went out, he pivoted, the grin etched on his face.

"Maybe it *was* a joke," he said slowly. "Personally, I'd hate to think that by cheating at poker, I'd caused a man to commit suicide."

He was outside before Stern could shout at him. Stern raged silently for a few minutes. Then he slumped back in his chair. His face gradually became sickly gray. He stared dully at the wall.

"Nonsense," he murmured to himself, "Damned, imaginative nonsense."

THE RESTAURANT was quiet. People came here to eat good food, without music or fanfare. Larry Stern stared about him, his stomach well filled, his mind more at rest. He wiped his lips with the napkin and layed it, clean side up, on the table cloth. Without looking at the man, he said to the waiter:

"Bring my check. No hurry."

The waiter moved away without a sound. Stern took a pencil from his pocket and started making notes on the table cloth. He always carried a pencil in his pocket. Heavy, soft lead worked well on anything. His ideas flowed better through the medium of the pencil.

His drawing had to do with the water-cooled jacket to fit the new Ajax Eight. The Ajax Eight was Stern's pet. A powerful, custom built automobile, it had made a fortune for him. Lately, Ajax sales were falling off. Paul Warner, supposedly an expert engineer, had been unable to improve any of the basic designs. Jeff Fellows had done better. He had done some powerful things to the design of the automobile body, and, had met and fallen in love with Stern's daughter, Lela.

All of which, Stern thought idly, was beside the point.

The water cooler had Stern stopped on one point. It worked perfectly, except that there was one outlet Stern couldn't figure out. He'd been trying to solve that little problem for weeks. It took all of his spare time, and a heavy quota of paper. He was no closer to a solution.

Slowly, he did the whole sketch once more, all but that one missing outlet. He swore softly to himself. He leaned on his elbows, staring at the napkin. It should be easy, he thought. It just doesn't figure out as it ought to. Suddenly he picked up the pencil again. To occupy his time, he started shading in the main portion of the drawing.

Something hit his elbow a sudden jolt, causing the pencil to leave a wide line across the entire face of the drawing. He turned, angry, because he thought the waiter had returned and bumped into him in a moment of clumsiness.

Stern's face reddened. There was no one near him. He looked around, shrugged and returned to the drawing. Suddenly his eyes narrowed and he held the pencil a little more stubbornly.

There *was* someone there. Someone —or something.

A power seemed to grasp his hand.

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The power, a heavy, controlling force held his fingers in its grip. Trying not to make a fool of himself, Stern fought against it. The power held. He could no longer dictate the movement of his hand. The whole arm, the pencil, were out of his control.

The hand started moving smoothly, swiftly across the drawing. Stern's face broke out with perspiration.

He had no choice but to sit still, eyes narrowed, staring at what was being created under his scrutiny. Lines appeared on the drawing. As if by his own genius, the outlet appeared. The outlet to the cooler which he had sweated over unsuccessfully for so long. It appeared expertly. Stern's hand jerked to the bottom of the napkin. Two quick movements, and the initials materialized. The initials of a dead man,—P. W.

The grip on his hand relaxed. Larry Stern slumped forward in his chair, nerveless fingers resting across the drawing. His eyes widened gradually, fully seeing and understanding what had been visible from the very first. The first fear he had ever felt since birth, poured into his body, drowning every other emotion that lived there.

This, he thought, is the beginning—and maybe the end. This is the draftsmanship of a dead man, keeping a promise to come back.

He sat there for a long time, wondering what it meant. When he went out, his step was unsteady, and his heartbreak quickened with the new and ever-present fear. He steadied himself against the door before he walked into the street.

JEFF FELLOWS came into the library. He eased himself comfortably into a chair and stared around him. Larry Stern was slumped down at his desk beside the fireplace. His brooding face told Fellows that he was putting in some more bad moments in the presence of his family.

Edith Stern, always cold as ice, unsmiling, stood near the window. Her back was turned to the room. Lela, Stern's strikingly beautiful daughter, pouted like a child. She sat on the sofa opposite Fellows, her slim legs drawn up carefully under her.

"Well, well," Fellows said. "Don't tell me these charming people are at odds with the world once more?"

It was evident that he knew they were, and enjoyed being a part of every family quarrel.

Edith Stern pivoted and walked gracefully toward him. Edith's eyes made Fellows feel ill. They were gray, and cold. They reflected hatred—cold hatred.

"My daughter seems to be able to put up with your disgusting manners," she said. "As mistress of this house, *I* don't have to listen to your insults."

Lela tensed like a graceful cat.

"Mother!" she said. It was meant to be a warning. Fellows was sure of that. Edith Stern didn't even give her daughter a glance. She went past them and out of the library. Even her shoulders were cold and stiff, and Fellows sighed when she was out of sight.

"A rag—a bone, a hank of hair," he repeated idly.

"You shouldn't talk like that, Jeff," Lela said gently. Her voice purred at him. Her eyes twinkled in complete agreement of *anything* he might say. "Mother will hunt you down with the butcher knife one of these fine days."

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Larry Stern seemed to come to life. His face, sullen and brooding, had been resting on his arms. Now he grinned wolfishly at Fellows.

"That," he announced," will be the happiest moment of my life. I only hope it will be a battle to the finish. I'd lovingly place wreaths on both of your graves."

The room was silent for a few moments. Finally Fellows chuckled in a manner that was meant to break the tension, but didn't.

"Speaking of funerals, and such, Larry," he said, "has Paul Warner been in to see you lately."

Lela studied her nails. She shuddered.

"Jeff, for God's sake..."

"Shut up, Darling," Fellows told her. "Larry came out with quite a nice job on a water cooler. You wouldn't understand the problem, because women are disgustingly ignorant of anything but cash and carry. However, this little job will net your nice old Daddy a cool million and a half before he's done with it."

"I told you to keep your mouth shut about that," Stern snapped. He started to rise, sank back and stared at Fellows.

"I don't understand," Lela said. "About the water cooler, I mean. Your other nasty crack will be considered later."

"You *wouldn't* understand, darling," Fellows said. His eyes were on Stern—probing, questioning. "It just happens that every time Larry comes up with a brilliant drawing these days, the initials P. W. are signed at the bottom of it. Initials that won't allow themselves to be erased, washed, or in any manner removed from said drawing. Your old Pappy once made a deal with a dead man. Paul Warner was his name and he was an expert engineer. Paul's evidently keeping his promise, but even poor old Paul wants the credit for his work. Hence the stubborn initials that insist on attaching themselves to Larry's new brain children."

LELA AROSE from the sofa. Her robe, ankle length, clung to her body. She was tall like her mother, but built gracefully in a flat, bony sort of way. Jeff Fellows admitted to himself that a man didn't see Lela as quickly as he saw the money behind her. Lela went over and leaned on her father's desk. She started rubbing his hair with her slim fingers.

"Mother doesn't know about this new and *rich* chapter of your life, does she?"

Her voice was soft, but if cut at him like a rusty file.

"She doesn't. It's a lot of bunk, that part about Paul. The drawings are mine."

The girl's voice didn't lose its gentle threat.

"We'll leave out the ghost walking," she said. "I'm referring to all that nasty money you're making. There'll be a lot more of it now?"

He nodded, looking down at the desk top. He didn't dare look into her eyes. He had a feeling that if he stared into those gray reflections of evil, he'd choke her. God, he wanted to choke her. He wanted to choke Edith, too, if he ever got the courage.

"If mother knew, she'd see that you were pronounced insane. She'd get her divorce, and *all* the money. Sane people don't fool with ghosts."

He stared up at her suddenly, defiantly.

"You're getting fancy ideas that you can't prove, my girl."

"Like what?" Jeff Fellows chimed in.

"Look here," Stern's voice was suddenly childishly pleading, "You're

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all against me. All three of you are in on this thing together, I'll swear that you're all lying. How can a man be proven insane on such grounds? It's—it's foolish."

Lela's fingers moved gently through his hair. He jerked away from her, coming to his feet.

"Keep away from me, or I'll..."

The girl backed away from him, her eyes hard, brilliant.

"You'll increase my allowance to five hundred a month, tomorrow. That's *all* you'll do, or you'll be damned sorry. Mother *might* find out about those drawings, and she *might* be able to prove that you're a little cracked, with the help of a good lawyer, of course."

"Okay, you want money. You're cheap enough to demand a cash settlement and get it."

Lela reached out suddenly and slapped him full in the face.

"For that filthy remark, you can double the five hundred. A thousand a month, until I decide you can afford to pay more. Meanwhile, mother doesn't need to know anything about your ghostly adviser."

She turned her back on him and went to Jeff Fellows.

"Come on, Jeff," she demanded. "I need some tennis, and some good clean air. This halo of rightousness that hovers around him makes me sick."

Larry Stern stared after them as they went out. His breath was coming hard. He sucked it between tightly pressed teeth.

"Damned vampire," he whispered. "Damned, deadly vampire."

LARRY STERN sat in his office, staring at the blank, white wall before his desk. He had tried a dozen times to reason it out. In the first place, he admitted to himself, ghosts had always been bed-sheeted things that floated down the halls of his childhood dreams. They had been story book monsters clanking chains in dusty mansions. Paul Warner was vastly more subtle. Paul had made a promise.

"I'll be your servant for keeps." Paul had said.

Paul Warner was a good servant. He never molested Stern. He caused Stern to make more money than the man had ever dreamed of before. Still, today, Larry Stern was badly worried.

He looked away from the wall occasionally, then back again, badly puzzled. Each time, as he looked away, he was sure that he *saw* something on the wall's white surface. It was like a screen, with weird shadows projected against it.

He tried again, looking quickly away toward the window.

Yes, he did see *something*. A sort of vague black and white image that flitted across the wall. When he forced his eyes back to it, the image was gone. He did it a half dozen times. Then he was aware of the voices. The voices were all too far away and too jumbled for him to make sense out of them.

The office was cool, but Stern dried the perspiration on his face. He decided not to look away again. He'd stare at the wall until he caught the shadow that lurked there. He leaned forward and rested his chin in his cupped hands. He stared at the blank space.

The voices grew louder. They seemed to be trying to tell him something, but he couldn't even guess what they said. He didn't like the voices. They frightened him.

Now the image came again. Moving, weaving black lines appeared. Some moved up and down, from floor to ceiling. Some snaked their way across from wall to wall. They

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pulsated and wriggled like living things. Black against white. Bars against a clean sheet.

Stern clawed at his chin with a nervous finger. He forced himself to continue his study of the screen. The meaningless serpents of black squirmed wildly. Circles and wider circles. Squares and larger squares. The voices rose to maddening loudness, and yet, they said nothing to Stern.

Driven half mad by the things he saw, Stern tried to look away. He couldn't. He tried to close his eyes but they wouldn't close. His hands were sticky. His face dripped perspiration. His whole body was rigid. He had to go on staring at those millions of lines as they wove into intricate, meaningless designs.

But the movement was slowing. The lines were blending into a pattern. They gradually took shape.

Stern's muscles relaxed. His hands dropped to the desk. He reached for a handkerchief and mopped his face. There, before his eyes, drawn on the wall, was the most perfectly streamlined automobile he had ever dreamed of.

There were two pencil lines, still wavering, still crawling about the wall. He watched them attentively as they moved toward the bottom of the drawing. They curled about each other and were still.

Larry Stern had a completed drawing for a new automobile. He had it, but he also had the two initials that would some day destroy his mind. The bottom of the life-size drawing was neatly signed—P.W.

HIS SECRETARY came in, tossing curly, fluffy hair back from her smooth face. She seated herself opposite him and said;

"Mrs. Stern called just before you came in. She'll be in at nine."

Stern swore aloud. He looked at Miss Jerald from the corner of his eyes. He wondered how much she knew about his quarrels with Edith. Miss Jerald was busy with her shorthand notebook.

"I'll be leaving before my wife comes in," he said shortly. "Tell her I'm busy with the plans for the new Ajax Eight."

Miss Jerald smiled approvingly.

"If a secretary has permission to compliment her boss, I'd like to tell you how wonderful that new design is. We've had several thousand phone calls. Dealers are flocking in from all over the country. It amazes me, Mr. Stern, that you were actually able to create such a car. The manner in which you did it. Alone in your office. A blank wall. You have tremendous imagination."

Normally Stern would have enjoyed such praise. It cut at him this morning like a rusty knife against his side.

"Very nice of you, Miss Jerald," he said. "Did you ever stop to think what it means to be very successful and filthy rich?"

Miss Jerald hadn't. She found a sharpened pencil in her coat pocket, balanced her notebook on her crossed knees and became attentive.

"Listen," Stern said sharply "Don't put this on paper. It isn't the sort of speech that would look good on paper."

He sighed, and stared out the window. He started to talk in a low voice.

"I was an average, sometimes happy business man before I learned to cheat at poker, and love it,"

He was sorry for Miss Jerald. She looked very hurt at this moment. He had to talk, though, and there wasn't anyone else to talk to. At least he paid her good wages for listening.

"At first I wasn't so clever. Then

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I became an expert. I fleeced everyone who came along. The last, and cleverest poker game I ever played, consisted of two kings hidden, of all places, up my sleeve. Sounds silly, doesn't it?"

He didn't give her time to answer. He hurried on, spilling words at her as though time was all important.

"Those two kings took the last money away from an employee of mine. They tripped a trapdoor in his brain and he went crazy. He shot himself the night we played that game."

He watched her face. Watched the form fade and the look of stark horror that replaced it. Her eyes grew wide. The pencil in her hand slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor.

"Not—Paul—Warner?"

He nodded. He knew she liked Warner. Most of the people around the office *did* like him.

"I've always had to have a lot of money," he said. "I've had to support a wife that I hate. I've had to care for a hateful, grasping woman and her vampire daughter. Don't get me wrong, Miss Jerald. I'm not accusing Lela of sucking blood. No, nothing as crude as that. Her hatred for me has sucked away the urge to go on living, the ability to love or admire anything about her. Now I have money. I have it in carloads. I've even hired three new lawyers to keep track of it for me."

He was sweating again. He knew it wasn't good for his heart. It was blood pressure popping off. His palms were wet. His breath was short.

"After that poker game, my luck suddenly became very good. I've invented or perfected seventeen separate items that can be used on the Ajax Eight. Now I've created a dream car, so far ahead of the field that other manufacturers are offering me millions to shut down my own plant and work for them."

MISS JERALD was nodding her head automatically. Her eyes were shining. Damn her, Stern thought. Even against her own will, she's impressed with my work. She had forgotten to be miserable. She was only thinking how clever he was.

He brought his fist down on the table top forcefully.

"I don't like it!" he shouted.

Startled, she grasped the notebook in both hands. She started to stand up.

"Sit down!" he said sternly, and the girl obeyed him, lips parted, eyes staring straight ahead.

"Now, I'm going to tell you *why* I don't like it," Stern said. "I don't like it because my wife, damn her black soul, has decided not to divorce me. She's going to stay around until I die, or go mad. She's going to be here waiting to get everything she can—when she can.

"My daughter, sweety soul, would made a fine lover for Frankenstein. She just *loves* her Daddy, and she's looking for a sharp knife to insert between my ribs. She's bleeding me for all the cash she can get.

"The cleverest of them all is Jeff Fellows. *He's* got a system that can't be beaten. He *knows* the secret of my success, and he's cutting in for a big share."

He watched Miss Jerald carefully, letting his words sink in.

"Shall I tell you the secret? Shall I let you know how you two can cut yourself in on a fortune? Bleed me just as my family does? Get your share of vampire's money?"

His voice was bitter beyond description. His face was fiery red. The girl seemed in a trance, as though

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staring at the weaving head of a serpent. Her lips were blue lines. She nodded, and it maddened him, though he knew the movement was mechanical.

"Good," he said. "Jeff Fellows knows something that allows him to demand all the money he needs. He knows that at the bottom of every new sketch, there are two initials, P. W. If you think those initials can be erased, I'll give you a thousand dollars to remove them from that life-sized drawing of the new Ajax. Tomorrow they'll be back again, clear and untouched. You know whose initials they are?"

Her head nodded again. It was a hazy, dreamy movement.

"Sure, you do," he snapped. "Sure. So does Fellows. Those are Paul Warner's initials. Paul came back, all right. He's serving me just as he promised he would. Paul's a very faithful servant. He's doing a fine job. I've made millions of dollars with his help. Why? So my wife and my daughter, and Jeff Fellows can steal it from me. So I can go on making more money and becoming more miserable every day I live. Now do you understand?"

Her head didn't move. She didn't even seem to be breathing. Her eyes were narrowed. Her hands were clenched in her lap.

"Sure you understand," he said. "Paul Warner is practicing the cleverest game ever conceived. He's holding himself to every letter of his promise. He's being very kind to me, isn't he Miss Jerald?"

His voice was so soft that he might have been whispering.

She didn't answer. The room was like a tomb. The girl, a piece of stone.

"Well, isn't he?"

He shouted wildly. She seemed to awaken with a start. On her feet, she ran toward the door, crazed panic showing in every movement. She closed the door behind her quietly by force of habit. Stern's head rocked forward and his cheek rested on the blotter pad. Great sobs shook his body.

"Now you've done it," he thought. "Now *she* thinks your crazy."

There was no relief in tears. This was the first time in his adult life that he had ever cried. He didn't know how. It hurt him. He acted like a man with alternate touches of fever and chill. He sat and cursed himself and Paul Warner, and his family. When at last he managed to regain his control, he stared at the blotter on the desk, where the tears had made it wet.

"You can kill a man with kindness," he said fiercely. "You can do it just as surely as by using a knife."

He thought a lot about knives after that, and wondered if it would be hard to use one on himself.

He wasn't man enough to face Paul Warner—not yet. If he used a knife, he'd be sure to face Paul. Paul. Somehow, he knew that.

It wasn't any surprise to Stern when the shifting black lines started to appear on the blotter. He sat very still, watching them because he couldn't look away. He didn't have the will to fight any more. He knew that when the lines started to settle down, they would become a new design. The design would be a new engine part, and it would enable him to net another half-million dollars for Ajax Eight.

Another design, with Paul Warner's initials signed at the bottom of the blotter.

"I HATE TO shock you, Larry," Jeff Fellows said calmly. "It's only fair that I mention Edith's intentions to murder you. She asked

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me to help."

He crossed his legs, lighted a cigarette and smoothed his trousers. He waited for signs of shock to etch themselves on Stern's face. The man only looked sullen.

"Of course you'd like to cooperate with her?"

Fellows grinned.

"It may amaze you," he admitted. "However, I'm not going to help her. She said she'd see that Lela and I get our share of the money. I told her Lela and I would do all right without planting you among the daisies. She told *me* to go to hell."

"My wife's decision to act isn't any great shock," Stern said. "I've been aware of her cyanide instincts for a long time. Just how does she plan her little attack?"

Fellows wagged one finger at him.

"That would be betraying a professional secret," he said. "Enough that I've taken the trouble to warn you. It's your battle, not mine. Lela and I won't try to prevent it, we're sitting pretty, no matter what happens."

In spite of his acting, Larry Stern was frightened. It wasn't just a matter of dying now. He couldn't die, for then he would face Paul Warner. Stern had to bluff. Bluffing was easy in a poker game. He wasn't so good at it when the stakes were life or death.

"I suppose you and Lela have also made plans?"

Fellows seemed to be thinking it over.

"I'm not so sure," he admitted. "Lela agrees that as long as you make money, we'll be better off with you alive. We're satisfied with the money were getting now. You heard that Lela and I were married this morning?"

Stern nodded, only half hearing.

"Yes," Fellows went on sardonically. "It's quite an alliance. Lela and I—and your money. No, Lela and I will put up with you for a while."

"And if I go to the police with the whole story? If I tell them that Edith and Lela and you are trying to murder me?"

Fellows' eyes narrowed and became slits of fury. Without moving a muscle, he conveyed a picture of hate and power that cowed Stern.

"You've been acting queer for weeks," he said in a low voice. "Your employees know there's something wrong. This morning you frightened your private secretary half out of her wits. *She'll testify that you are a madman, when and if I decide that you should be confined to a sanitarium.*"

EDITH came through their private bath, into his bedroom. She was clad in what he used to call her *seductive* nightgown. She crossed the room and seated herself on the edge of his bed. She looked lovely, Stern thought. Like a dream girl who could become a nightmare of death. He wondered if even her kisses were poison.

"You look tired, Larry Darling."

She started stroking his forehead.

He put his book aside and stared up at her. He tried to smile. He had been reading a little every night. It was better than lying awake, staring at the wall.

"Not tired enough to relax my guard," he thought.

Aloud, he said:

"You misjudge me, Edith. I'm working hard these days. I have to work to enjoy life."

She slipped into bed beside him. She was warm and relaxed. For a moment he wondered if Fellows had lied. She was his wife. He deserved her love, her affection.

"Florida would be good for you,"

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she whispered. "A month to rest."

"So I could be away while you prepare the death weapon," he thought.

He found his muscles growing tense again. Would she notice?

"Got to keep at work," he said, trying to laugh lightly. "The new car will be rolling off the assembly line next week. Then, maybe..."

She lay very quietly for a long time. He didn't want his arms around her now. She felt like a snake, her body an impersonal thing that didn't belong beside him.

"Larry?"

Her voice was sleepy.

"Uhuh?"

"Larry, Darling. There's a bottle of milk in the refrigerator. Will you be a good boy and bring up a couple of glasses for us?"

"Sure," he said, with a suddenness that startled even himself. "Always the willing servant."

He found his slippers and robe. Downstairs he found the bottle and a couple of glasses. It troubled him, though. It troubled him a lot. He kept thinking about it all the way back upstairs.

She was waiting. She let him pour both glasses and drained hers swiftly. His milk seemed to burn his throat, though he knew she had had no opportunity to...

Sitting on the edge of the bed, her back to him, she poured another glass. She put it in his hand.

"Full up," she said gaily. "Drink it. Good for you."

"Can't do," he said. "Leave it on the table. I'll probably lie awake. If I need it later..."

She left him, kissing him on the mouth—hard. He had to admire her, still slim, as she passed before the table lamp. She's faithful, Larry, he kept repeating to himself after she had gone. Drink it, Larry. Prove to yourself that Jeff Fellows in a liar.

Almost savagely he grasped the glass of milk and lifted it to his lips. A strange thing took place in the room. Suddenly, as though they had been here all the time, the voices came. Strong, angry voices. Voices that said nothing, yet told him everything.

He knew they were the voices of the dead. Voices that babbled and screamed. A great force grasped his wrist and twisted it painfully. He cried out, and watched the glass of milk go flying into the air. It hit the floor and splintered into dozens of pieces. The milk made a white stain against the dark polished walnut.

The force that had thrown the glass from him was gone. The voices were gone. Stern was on his feet, shaking, suddenly very cold.

"You damned fool. What did you do?" Edith was standing in the doorway. Her face was pale. "Acting like a child. Baby doesn't like his milk!"

She was furious. He smiled at her, foolishly. He tried to steady his voice.

"I guess I am—about the damndest fool alive on earth," he said.

She pivoted and left him alone. He was glad that she hadn't demanded an explanation. It gave him time to turn on the bedlamp and examine the bruised wrist.

It was black and blue. There were fingerprints.

When he spoke, Larry Stern knew that he wasn't alone in the room.

"You saved my life," he said bitterly. "Maybe I ought to thank you. I don't. I curse you for making me rich. I curse you for making me live, because now I want to die. I'm not afraid to face you anymore. I'd rather face you than—her. I curse you, do you hear me?"

The room remained silent. There

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were no more voices after that.

JEFF FELLOWS said;

"Stern, or Daddy, as I should probably call you now, we've reached a decision concerning the business."

Larry Stern was in a slightly better mood today. Ajax Eight had shown a good profit even during first week's sale of the new model. There had been no ghostly disturbance for several weeks. He had a good meal in his now huge stomach. He put his fork aside carefully and grinned. The grin, however, reflected no humor.

"It's wonderful to have the family take such interest in me," he said. "What have you in mind, *Son?*"

Edith and Lela were both at the table. They remained silent. Evidently neither of them saw anything funny in the situation.

"It's like this," Fellows explained. "Ajax holdings have trippled in the past year. You have more money than we can ever spend. We strive only to be helpful, understand?"

Stern clenched his fists under the table.

"Of course," he agreed.

"You will divide the company into four equal parts. Up to now, we've been depending on your generous contributions. Now we'd like a word on the company policies. We'd like to have you set us all up in business."

Lela was smiling. She admired her husband very much. Edith's face was a mask. Any division of the spoils would please her.

"And if I refuse to cooperate," Stern asked?

Fellows leaned forward, tapping his plate with a coffee spoon.

"Then you're going to lead a miserable life from here on out."

A horrible anger welled up inside Larry Stern. He came to his feet, kicking his chair over behind him. He stood very still, arms at his sides, fists still clenched. He didn't even hear the chair as it crashed to the floor.

"You can all go to hell!" he shouted, and charged blindly toward the door.

* * *

Loneliness became the hardest thing Larry Stern had to bear. He took his meals away from home. Usually he slept at the club. His friends talked about him, yet to his face, made him feel that he was their idea of a brilliant business man and engineer. His employees knew something was wrong. Miss Jerald left the company, but before she went, Larry Stern knew that she had talked her fool head off about him.

He sat in his office late, night after night. Always the voices of the dead were there. They talked and talked, and he could hear none of their message. They grew louder until they frightened him. Until he thought they would burst into his brain and stay there forever.

"One more cigar. Then I'll go home."

Home?

No, not home. To the club, where at least, no one would slit his throat while he slept. If he could sleep.

Edith was leaving on Monday for Reno. She was tired of waiting for him to get the courage to die. She would have a hundred thousand dollars in her account. He must pay her five hundred a week, extra, as long as he lived.

He cursed Edith fervently, because she was going away from him, and her last bit of power to frighten him was lost.

Everything was settled at Ajax Eight. Jeff Fellows, loving Son-in-Law, was Vice President. That, said everyone, was right. Larry Stern had

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placed his Son-in-Law in the boy's rightful spot.

The truth of the matter was simple. Lela and Jeff had hounded him day and night, drawing blood with every cruel remark, every word they said. He had given up. A man can't fight hatred forever. Fellows had what he wanted, at least for the time being.

Finally Stern left the office. The voices went with him tonight, down the empty halls, out into the street. At the corner, he paused. Traffic was moving swiftly up and down the boulevard. Nice thing, traffic. It swallowed up everything so nicely. You could lose yourself simply by stepping into it. You could be swallowed up also.

If he crossed suddenly, against the light? If he jumped from the curb, into that roaring inferno of moving steel? He could almost hear the excited shouting—the scream of brakes—the sudden ending of...

Craftily, as though some new and clever scheme had awakened his mind, Stern moved to the curb. The light changed. The traffic leaped forward like a snarling, noisy beast.

He stepped from the curb. He heard the scream of brakes as he knew he would. He relaxed, feeling the sudden, jolting pain. He let himself be torn apart, tossed under heavy, hot rubber. A man's voice shouted. A cruel blow against his right side. The searing pain in his leg. After that it was all very moist and warm and dark. He loved the darkness...

HE COULD hear the voices again. This time, he understood them. It was wonderful, he thought, to actually understand the voices. It meant that everything was over. That his problem had been solved. He understood.

He concentrated on them, listening to every word.

"I'm going to kill myself." Paul Warner's voice. "I'll make you a side bet. I'm going to kill myself."

Then closer. Voices changing. Sounds. Worried sounds.

"He's going to be all right. Right leg amputated—mind will clear—he's going to be—all right—right—right—right leg amputated."

Then he knew the truth. Knew he had not found the death he sought. He had come back from death. These weren't the voices of the dead. They came from human throats.

"Oh, God," he moaned, and tried to turn on his side. His leg—right leg—hurt him bad. Hurt from his toes to his hip. His right leg.

"Quiet," the voices were saying. A thousand voices, all in one, echoing in a great hall. "Quiet. He's coming around.—around—around—around..."

He heard other sounds. Footsteps, passing out of hearing. He opened his eyes and recognized the room. A white walled room in one of his own hospitals. A barren, lonely room with blank, white walls. Like awful screens, the walls were waiting for images to be projected against them.

"My—leg hurts."

He murmured the words to himself, knowing there was no one to care. *He* didn't care any more. He wished he was dead.

He lay very still, letting his thoughts collect themselves.

"Right leg amputated—right—right—right..."

He had heard those words before, in the warm darkness from which he had emerged. *So that was why his right leg hurt so damned bad?* A car had hit him. Crushed his leg. The severed nerves were protesting. Hesitatingly, with great mental

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agony, he let his fingers move down across the sheet, to a spot above his hip. There was only emptiness. He started to sob wildly. Alone, crying, staring with horror at the blank walls.

With infinite care and horrible irony, the black lines started to appear. They danced like evil spirits on the blank surface of the wall. He knew then that he couldn't die. There was a spirit on earth, the spirit of Paul Warner. Paul Warner was here to prevent him from dying. Paul Warner—fulfilling every word of his promise.

Stern watched the black lines with the patience of a moody beast that understands only a small part of what is happening. The lines crawled about, forming their pattern. A new design. The front portion of an automobile. The bumpers, wide, well cushioned in rubber. New shock-proof springs hidden behind the shining bumper. A far advanced design for a bumper that would carry none of the shock of collision to the rider.

Then, like an ugly sneer, the initials twisted into shape below the drawing. Larry Stern knew what Paul Warner was telling him. *Don't be a fool, Larry Stern. You can't die, even before the roaring onslaught of steel and rubber. You're being cushioned, Larry. Cushioned and protected from anything that might steal you away from mortal life.*

Ironically enough, Stern thought, that drawing, the very drawing that was causing the ghost of Paul Warner to double up with laughter, would make him another million dollars. Another million from the perfect servant. The servant whose only will was to keep him alive—.

He lay on the bed and laughed long and loud. Laughed until frothy bubbles spilled over his lips. And his laughter continued as he opened his mind to the voices pounding at his mental barrier.

They crowded in and his laughter became a hysterical babble.

That was the way! Let them in! Let them suffer—with him!...

THE END

PARAPLEGIC SKILLS

By H. R. Stanton

THOSE MEN who suffered spinal wounds in the war and who are paralyzed from the waist down certainly deserve every consideration a grateful nation can give them. Paraplegics are indeed one of the greatest tragedies of our time. In an effort to enable them to be self-sufficient, the government has provided them with automobiles equipped with remote control devices in proportion to the disability of the driver.

This offers an excellent example of refined control engineering as used today. Thus an automobile may be driven entirely with the hands. Powerful multiplying devices enable the fingers to actuate the brakes with any desired degree of force. A simple linkage connects the accelerator to a knob on the steering post. Automatic transmissions eliminate the need for shifting. Thus a man who has nothing but the use of his arms may drive an automobile with perfect safety.

One paraplegic, an inventor has gone so far as to make a series of automatic controls which may be applied to any car and to compensate for any degree of human disability. Thus any disabled person who still retains the use of his hands and eyes may have an opportunity to drive a vehicle in perfect safety. Furthermore in order that the mechanism may have the widest application, it is sold at a very reasonable price—in the neighborhood of seventy dollars. Aside from the automaticity available to injured persons, this is an excellent indication of how it is possible to make machinery perform almost any function, whatever it may be. The automobile of the future will certainly have no other control than brakes, accelerator and steering wheel. Many cars today already are this simple. Soon it will be a general state.

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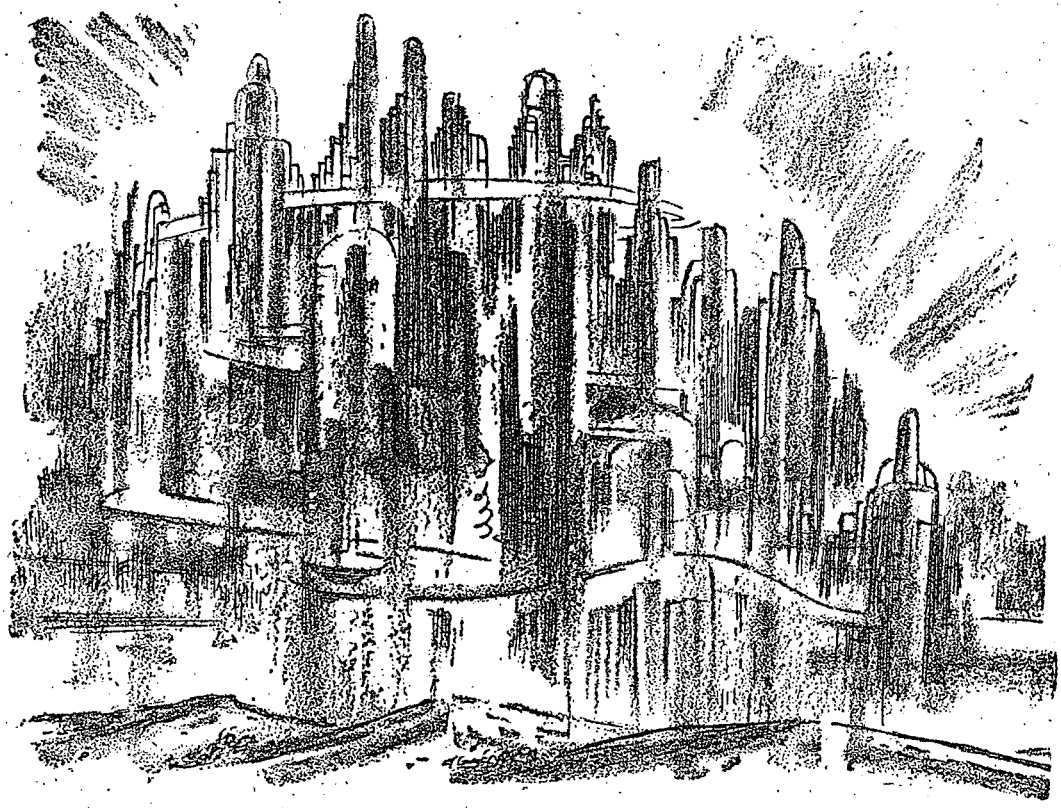

JIRANDEL

by WARREN KASTEL

Was it possible that Millicent really saw a strange world that didn't exist? Paul Corwin doubted it — until *he* saw Jirandel . . .

THE TWO men reached the crest of the grassy slope. From here the north wall of Sylvan Rest was visible, its ivy mantle softening the grimness of its imprisoning height. Walbeck nudged Vanner and made a restrained gesture of pointing at a girl and a young man who sat shaded from the warm afternoon sun beneath a maple tree.

"Now there," Walbeck murmured, "is one of our most interesting cases."

"Which one?" Vanner asked. "The girl, or her companion?"

"The girl in particular," Walbeck

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said, with the ghost of a chuckle. "The young fellow is Paul Corwin, my assistant."

Vanner's thick gray brows became arches of surprise. "He looks rather young to help run a refined private booby-hatch like this."

"Perhaps. But I assure you, Paul has all the necessary qualifications. As for your booby-hatch remark, Carl, I hope you don't mind if I prefer to have Syvlan Rest considered as a private retreat for those mentally indisposed to living in the outside world."

"Mentally indisposed?" Vanner grinned beneath his bristling mustache. "Batty is what you mean, Anton, but have it your own way. I didn't mean to be insulting. In fact, I rather envy you. Compared to Sylvan Rest, my hospital is a sweat shop. I thought you were wrong in taking up psychiatry, but you've

The young couple seemed to be oblivious of the presence of the two men who stood a short distance away, watching them . . .

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made it pay."

Walbeck shrugged his stooped, spare shoulders, gestured once more at the couple beneath the maple tree. "Care to meet them, Carl?"

"It might be interesting."

The girl and the young man seemed oblivious of everything but themselves. They were holding hands and talking animatedly. Once the girl laughed, a silvery tinkle that was like a crystallization of pure happiness.

Then, noticing the approach of Walbeck and Vanner, they fell silent. With smiles of greeting, they rose from the grass.

Walbeck said, "Millicent, Paul, I want you to meet Doctor Carl Vanner, an old friend who is visiting Syvlan Rest."

Admiration touched Vanner's face as he shook hands. They were a handsome couple. The girl, slight and lovely, a bright wraith of laughter still glowing in her sea-blue eyes. The boy, firm-shouldered and straight, his gray gaze keen beneath a tumbled black thatch.

"Is your field psychiatry, Doctor Vanner?" Corwin asked.

Vanner shook his head with a wry smile. "Medicine—much to my regret. Until now I didn't know phychiatry had so many good points."

A few pleasantries were exchanged. Then Walbeck touched Vanner's arm.

"I'm sure the youngsters will do very well without us old fossils around, Carl. Shall we return to my office?"

"We still have a lot to talk over," Vanner agreed. With a few last words to Corwin and the girl, he turned and followed Walbeck back down the slope.

Under the maple tree, Corwin and Millicent dropped once more to the grass. They looked into each other's eyes and became lost again.

Vanner said softly, "They make a nice picture, those two."

Walbeck moved his head in a grave nod. "They are very much in love."

"That was obvious enough. But the girl . . . there is something wrong with her mind?"

"Yes. According to our standards of behavior, she is quite mad."

Vanner was amazed. "Mad! And yet, young Corwin—in love with her. . . ."

"It's a strange story," Walbeck said. "You might like to hear about it, Carl."

"I certainly would."

In his office Walbeck gestured Vanner into a chair drawn up beside his glass-topped desk and mixed drinks. When the glasses and a box of cigars had been set out, he seated himself in his high-backed leather swivel and began speaking slowly.

"Millicent comes from a wealthy and socially prominent family, the Van Ortt's. She was always queer, even as a child. Not violent, or disturbing, but queer enough for the pedigree-conscious Van Ortt's to want her safely out of sight. Millicent was committed to my care, and I know she has been happier here than when living with her own people.

"Shortly afterward I realized that I needed an assistant to help me with the increasing number of patients. I hired Corwin. He was young, but his training and background were excellent.

"Corwin was interested in Millicent from the very first. Like yourself, Carl, he was astonished that anything could be wrong with a girl so young and lovely. . . ."

IN WHAT seemed to Walbeck a very agony of disbelief, Corwin

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put his hands on the desk and leaned forward.

"But I've talked with her, Doctor! She seems normal enough. She's rather shy and self-conscious, but I'd swear there's nothing about her to indicate mental unbalance."

Walbeck smiled sympathetically. "Personal sentiments and impersonal facts seldom mix, Paul. Let's remember that. Millicent seems normal simply because she doesn't mention her delusions until she knows you well. Then her condition becomes apparent. When—and if—you gain her confidence, you'll see what I mean."

Subdued, Corwin sat back in his chair. He was silent for a long moment. Finally he asked:

"Just what sort of delusions does Millicent have?"

"She believes she had access to another world. . . a world she calls Jirandel. I don't fully understand the nature of this access to which she lays claim. According to what I have gathered from her explanations, it isn't physical but mental—or more accurately, perhaps, spiritual."

Walbeck shook his gray head somberly. "It's a strange sort of delusion. To Millicent this other world is very real, and she can describe it with fascinating clarity. From what she says, Jirandel is beautiful, a place of garden lands and winding streams, inhabited by a race of fairy-like beings who live in cities of rainbow-colored crystal towers. She's very emphatic on the point that Jirandel bears little resemblance to our world. She describes the sun there as being orange in color and very large, the sky a vivid shade of green. And at night there are three moons, instead of one as in our world."

Walbeck shook his head again. "Millicent apparently possesses a powerful if distorted imagination. I sometimes wonder what she was given to read as a child. The human mind doesn't get something from nothing, you know."

"What is your opinion of her condition, Doctor?" Corwin asked. "Is she. . . incurable?"

"I'm afraid so Paul. Millicent is entirely too convinced of her delusion to co-operate in any of the usual methods of treatment."

"But it can't be impossible!" Corwin insisted. "There must be something in her background that can be worked on. You mentioned her reading, Doctor. There might be something in that."

Walbeck lifted his spare shoulders. "Perhaps. I've given up, Paul, but I won't stop you from trying to make a cure of your own, so long as you don't do anything drastic."

"Then I'm going to try, Doctor." Corwin spoke softly, determinedly, his gray eyes lighted with sudden enthusiasm. "I'm going to cure Millicent. I'll never rest until I do."

Walbeck looked away, to gaze broodingly through the office windows at the grounds of Syvlan Rest, which were turning green in the annual miracle of spring. He was disturbed. He knew Corwin was already more than half in love with Millicent. Corwin had ideas, the benefits of advanced knowledge and training. A cure was possible—but unlikely. There was thus the danger that Corwin was laying himself open to disappointment with emotional implications of a type that might affect his entire life.

CAREFUL to give no indication of doing so, Walbeck watched Corwin and Millicent closely in the days that followed. He was pleased to note that Corwin was not trying to rush matters. Corwin would encounter the girl in the halls of the house or outside on the grounds, so

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casually it seemed more like chance than design, exchange a few pleasant remarks, and pass on. And gradually, Walbeck noticed that Millicent began to look forward to these meetings. The brief exchanges became extended conversations, and finally Corwin was spending all his free time with the girl.

"Have you found anything to work on yet?" Walbeck asked Corwin one evening.

"Not yet, Doctor. At least, nothing in the line I had hoped for. Millicent's education was by private teachers—the very best, of course. Her reading was carefully supervised. She'd never been allowed to touch anything of a fantastic nature. So that possibility is out."

Corwin's serious face brightened. "Anyway, I've won her confidence. And I think . . . I think she likes me. She's told me about Jirandel. It *is* fascinating in a way. I've heard so much about it I can almost see the crystal towers, the rivers and gardens. . . . She calls the fairy-like creatures the Kyrii. Jirandel may be a mere delusion, but it's beautiful to her—so beautiful she can make it catch at your throat."

Walbeck looked up from a thoughtful study of the glowing tip of his cigar. "Has Millicent mentioned anything about her method of access to Jirandel?"

"Well . . . she claims she can enter it at will. Not bodily, but in some manner she can't quite explain. There's nothing wrong with her education or her vocabulary, Doctor, but somehow the exact words, the precise shades of meaning, are beyond her grasp. I, too, get the impression of spiritual contact, but it seems to go further than that."

Corwin made a sudden gesture of irritation. "There has to be *something* at the bottom of this Jirandel, myth. I've got to find it. I've got to!"

Walbeck regarded his cigar again. Corwin's earlier confidence was gone, he noticed. Now, there was only a pleading note of despair in the younger man's words.

Fear touched Walbeck. Where would the situation end?

The routine-filled days at Sylvan Rest passed quickly. Spring deepened into summer, and the grounds became carpeted and cloaked lushly in green.

"It's hopeless," Corwin told Walbeck at last. "I've questioned Millicent for every possible explanation of her Jirandel delusion, but it leads nowhere. Jirandel wasn't conceived or evolved out of anything she'd read, been told, or overheard. It was always there. As far back as she can remember anything, it was always there. But how can that be, Doctor? How? You told me yourself that the mind doesn't get something from nothing."

"The sane, normal mind," Walbeck said. "As for the unbalanced mind, who can say?" He dropped a hand on Corwin's shoulder. I've been watching you and Millicent, Paul. I've seen what things were leading up to. You've got to put Millicent out of your mind. There is a fine future for you here at Sylvan Rest, and you can't throw it away on a girl who is obviously hopelessly mad."

"But, Doctor, I love her!"

"That's all the more reason why you should put her out of your mind."

CORWIN SHOOK his head doggedly. "Millicent loves me. She trusts me, needs me. I couldn't do anything to hurt her."

"Love," Walbeck muttered. "Love. . . ." His stooped figure grew tense. "Paul, I think I've found the solution we need. Love! Don't you

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see? For the first time in her life, Millicent has encountered something on the same level of importance as Jirandel—her love for you. Suppose she were forced to make a decision between you and Jirandel—made to understand that she could have one, but not both? This would clarify your problem in one of two ways. Either Millicent would put Jirandel out of her mind, or prove to you by retaining it the utter impossibility of marrying her."

Corwin's eyes glowed with rekindled hope. "It may work, Doctor! I'm going to try it."

Walbeck was pleased that the situation had at last been brought to a head, but he dreaded the possibility of unhappiness between Corwin and the girl. He sympathized with both, though forcing himself to view their relations practically. He was curious as to the outcome of the plan, yet he waited patiently until the next day before asking Corwin about results.

Corwin looked sheepish. "I'm sorry, Doctor, but I'm afraid I let Millicent talk me into something. You see, she told me it was unfair to her that I should consider Jirandel as something purely imaginative, which she could put out of her mind by an effort of will. She still claims that Jirandel actually exists. And . . . well, she got me to accept a counter-proposal. She's going to teach me her method of access to Jirandel. If I see it, I must accept it and allow her continued contact with it. If, however, I learn the method but do not see Jirandel, then she will be convinced that it is just a delusion and will forget about it entirely."

For a moment Walbeck couldn't decipher his feelings. Exasperation mingled with a wild desire to laugh. He got himself under control.

"Well, I don't see that any harm has been done. We can give her the benefit of the doubt. She may try some sort of mumbo-jumbo on you, but there won't be any Jirandel, of course."

Corwin grinned. "Naturally, Doctor, but it couldn't be any more effective than allowing her to be convinced in her own way."

WALBECK LEANED over the desk to drop the butt of his cigar in the ashtray. He leaned back in the swivel chair and chuckled softly.

"Corwin and Millicent are married now," he told Vanner. "Have been for over a year. I was sort of saving that for a surprise."

Vanner stared in bewilderment. "Then you and Corwin finally managed to effect a cure? But . . . but I thought you told me a while ago that girl was quite mad."

Walbeck was staring into distance, still smiling. He seemed not to have heard. He went on:

"I had some difficulty in getting the Van Ortts to permit the marriage, but when I pointed out Corwin's education and background, as well as how marriage to a man of his type would benefit Millicent, they finally gave in."

Vanner sputtered, "See here, Anton, I thought you told me the girl was mad!"

"And so she is, Carl—according to ordinary standards of behavior."

"Well, then, blast you, how does it happen Corwin married her if he didn't cure her of the Jirandel delusion?"

Walbeck chuckled again. "Remember Millicent's counter-proposal? She taught Corwin the method of access to Jirandel. It's just an extra perceptive sense which few of us ever learn to use. Millicent had been able to use it from birth through some

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freak of physiological development. She taught Corwin—and he saw Jirandel."

Vanner opened his mouth, then closed it. His twitching jaw muscles indicated a violent internal struggle.

"Nonsense!" he snapped at last. "This Jirandel—sheer nonsense!"

"No, Carl, there actually *is* such a place."

"Impossible!" Vanner snorted. "Have you gone crazy, too, Anton?"

Walbeck shook his head slowly, smiling. "I'll *show* you Jirandel, Carl. Millicent taught me the method of access, too. It's really quite simple once you know how . . . ."

THE END

PITCHBLENDE PIONEERS

★ By William Karney ★

THE DOZEN or so United States Mining Assay offices think that another "gold rush" has started to judge from the number of samples of ore that they're asked to assay. Of course, the ones who submit ore aren't interested in gold—they're interested in that new mineral, that mineral that promises such a great future financially—for them and for others—uranium!

The government has a standing offer. It will pay twenty thousand dollars for a lode consisting of at least twenty tons of ore assaying twenty per cent uranium! It will also pay an additional three dollars and fifty cents per pound for uranium ore over that quantity! That gives you some idea of how critical and how important the government thinks this material is. It also explains why so many ore samples are being sent in. Incidentally the agents carefully test each sample. They never know when someone might make a strike. So far as is known, we doubt that any private citizen has yet hit the jackpot on this material—but plenty are trying.

College students, miners, prospectors, vacationers, s-f fans, and people from every walk of life and station, are getting into the act. All uranium ore seeking requires is a Geiger counter which can now be purchased for as little as fifty dollars—the counter plus a spot to work it, and the great adventure is on. Some enthusiastic radiomen have built their own counters. And our government is in hearty accord with anyone who wants to hunt down the rare mineral. We've mentioned the government pamphlet which is selling like a best-seller. It tells a novice how to get started and where he's likely to stand a decent chance, although this latter no one can really say. Somebody may turn up a huge digging in a city dump.

Several Canadian amateurs have stumbled on some rather large lodes. We don't suppose the government is inclined to publish much about our own success but we wouldn't be surprised if all this energy expended has produced some fine results. Uranium hunting is a new frontier, and anyone engaged in it is performing a vital service. Here's luck—guys! The more uranium the better—it's just one step nearer to the stars!

* * *

DO IT YOURSELF

★ By W. R. Chase ★

THE AMERICAN habit of doing things for one's self, extends itself to every phase of living and every activity—from building reflecting telescopes of twelve inch aperture to building twelve inch television sets. We've reported on both of these things with enthusiasm. Any person with any technical inclination—"inclination, not ability"—whatsoever will find that he can do most anything, if he sets his mind to it. This seems to apply extraordinarily well to s-f fans who have a certain inescapable interest in technical things. Thus the response to build-it-yourself TV was tremendous.

It's encouraging to realize that Americans still possess this agressiveness as far as constructing and building things go. Judging from the meager reports we receive on rocketry, it looks like it'll have to be the amateurs who make the first trip to the moon.

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When speaking of this practice of doing things for one's self, it is not the intention to belittle or minimize the professional. Far from it, but it often happens that a man is not financially able to afford the custom or factory built job. Furthermore, the cost of most things, ranging from automobiles to TV sets lies not in the materials of which they are constructed but rather the labor that went into them.

This is exemplified by the new hobby of hot-rodding or racing which seems so popular. The kids who do it cannot afford commercial racing cars. So what do they do? They don't sit around bemoaning their fate. Instead they buy a cheap jaloppy, buy cheap parts, and go ahead and build their own!

Even among motorists, among the average car-owner, this realization has taken place. If he wants his car repaired, and he goes to a commercial garage, he will find that the labor of a repair job such as overhauling a motor, generally amounts to about three or four times the cost of the parts themselves. If *he* buys the parts and does the work, he can save a tremendous amount. As far as the technical aspects go, the problem is simple, for there are numerous cheap handbooks which show in detail how to do any given job from installing rings and bearings to putting in new brakes. One need not be a genius.

This is our strength, this ability to do things for ourselves. We were more or less joking about rocketry before, but it is not implausible to think that it may take the spark and enthusiasm of an amateur to fire the dull-witted military mind which sees a rocket purely as a projectile or a guided missile. Remember it was the amateur in Germany who started the real development of the rocket motor and also recall that the jet engine was primarily the result of private engineer Whipple in England. All of science and industry owes a debt of gratitude to the private enthusiast who will roll up his shirtsleeves and sail into a job for the love of it!

* * *

ANTI-GRAVITY — HOW?

By Milton Matthew

IT WON'T be long before Hollywood discovers the gold mine of fine science fiction stories available to it. We've predicted that this will happen in the not-distant future. It will be wonderful to see a real story of deep space on the screen. The creation of such films however is going to bring up some rather difficult problems of a technical nature. To retain the illusion of deep space is not going to be easy.

It is apparent that all of the techniques of rocketry brought to the screen will offer no difficulties. To assure yourself of that just recall the newsreel films of the launching of the V-2's. That impressive phenomenon looks like the launching of a space rocket without question. As a matter of fact, that is exactly what such a launching will look like when it is done. To the ingenious geniuses on the studio technical staffs, photography of that sort presents no problems.

The prop-rooms will supply all the space suits, all the instrument panels and all the weird flora and fauna that any space opera would need. But that isn't the total answer. There still remains a beauty.

Just how do you show a rocket ship in deep space—its interior, that is—non-accelerating?

That's the sixty-four dollar question. What it amounts to is showing a room with humans *not* under the influence of gravity! Here is a room; try and show human beings in it, free and floating, totally unhampered by the perpetual pull of gravity. Show the weird behavior of liquids influenced by no forces except those of surface tension. Show the articles, the instruments and utensils which when released, do not fall to the floor, but remain hovering in the air!

On Earth, so far, the only way in which this can occur,—bar none—is in a freely falling elevator. But an elevator can fall free only for a brief time. Similarly any plane can fall only for a short time. What is the answer?

It is easy to show the effects of increased gravity; all that need be done is to mount a room on a large centrifuge and let centrifugal force substitute for the elusive gravitational drag. We can rev up gravity but we can't throttle it down. The problem has often occurred to us and we can't think of any solution. Perhaps, the nature of space is destined to remain unfilmed until Man actually is able to put a rocket into it.

If we were to suggest the one remaining "mystery of nature" which still needs a lot of work we would say that the relation of gravity to electromagnetism, is it. This is the classic problem which Einstein and other theoretical physicists have set for themselves so far without adequate solution. Come on boys, get going! How else are we going to show movies of the interior of a rocket non-accelerating? Get on the ball, for the atomic age beckons. You're holding up a lot of fans. Oh, for a gravityless room...

* * *

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Wurk-man stood on the rubble littered edge of what had once been a great and beautiful city, sadness in his eyes . . .

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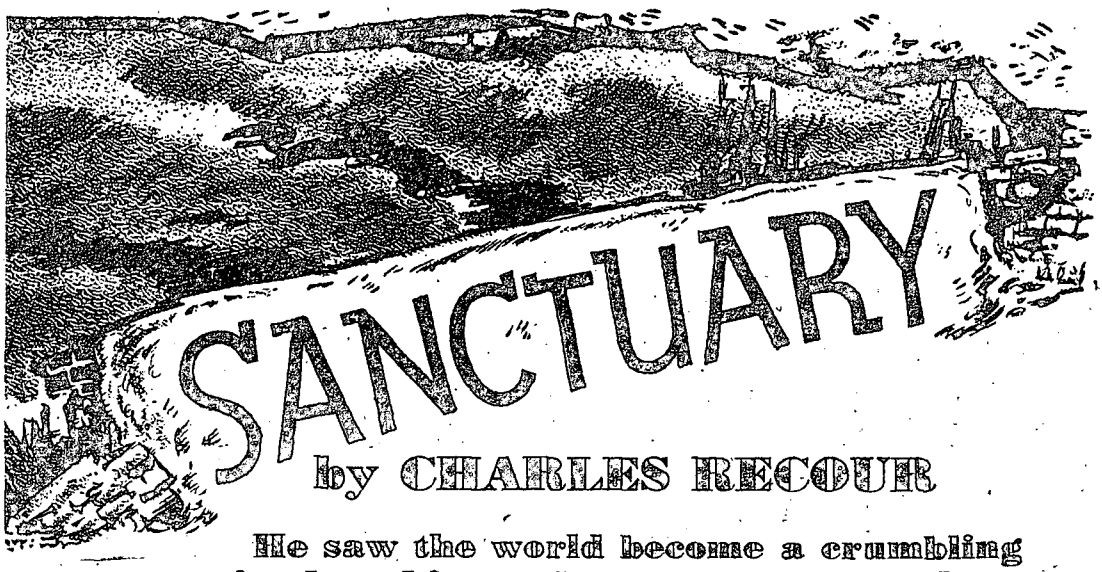

SANCTUARY

by CHARLES RECOUR

He saw the world become a crumbling ruin about him, and man reduced to a slave existence. Could he still fight on — alone?

I'M GOING to get caught.

The thought slithered up out of his subconscious and intruded into his mind. *I'm going to get caught. They'll* find out eventually. *They'll* know that you've skipped the Pleasure Time. *They'll* know where you've been going. *They'll* know all about you. You won't be able to escape.

Despair wrapped him like an icy hand. Wurk-Man Smith shuddered. He shook his head vigorously. The ominous shadow of coming events vanished and he came back to consciousness—and the present.

"Are you ill, Wurk-Man Smith?"

Nervously he turned and met the unctuous gaze of Fore-Man Georg. The pig-like eyes, set close together and wrapped in the puffy fatted face stared back solicitously at him.

"No Fore-Man," he answered. "I'm all right. I'm perfect, Sir. It's just that I—I—I..." His voice trailed off.

"If you're really not feeling well, I'll put another Wurk-Man on your machine and send you to the Dispensary," Fore-Man Georg assured him in measured considerate tones.

"There's nothing the matter, Sir," Smith answered humbly and for an instant his eyes rested on the omnipresent paratube hanging at the belt of the Fore-Man.

"Fine. Watch your machine now. We don't want anything to happen you know. The War is most important. Whenever you feel badly just look at the sign—and then think of the Pleasure Time. You'll be all right then."

The Fore-Man nodded encouragingly and continued his walk between the long rows of machines. He radiated an air of supernal kindliness.

But Smith wasn't fooled. He knew that in back of that friendly manner rested a merciless, heartless, coldness, which would make the Fore-Man send him to the Punishment Chambers as easily as he'd look at him.

Smith looked up at the banner which spread across the room. "Wurk Will Win the War," it said in gigantic letters, "And the Wurk-Men and

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the Fore-Men Will do the Wurk." The idiotic statement mocked him at every glance.

Briefly his eyes swept over the vast room in which he had spent most of his adult life. It was a lifeless concrete shell despite the noise and activity within it. Row upon endless row of machines, small and large, milling machines, radial drills, presses, engine lathes and automatic turret lathes—like the one before him—clanked and wrought their desire on the resisting metals fed to them.

Before each machine stood his counter part. Smith saw himself multiplied a thousand times. Pale skinny men and women, sexless and cold, all wearing the colorless grey coveralls of the Wurk-Man, tended their machines, made their adjustments, fed in their parts and removed the finished products. These they placed on the conveyor belts which carried them to the Assembly Room, to be manufactured into parts for some lethal weapon, perhaps, a rocket-bomb, perhaps an anti-rocket gun. Smith didn't know and didn't care.

He stiffened suddenly and jumped forward, but he was too late to prevent the tool from breaking. His left hand stabbed the shut-off button and the lathe ground to a shuddering stop.

HIS HANDS worked furiously and in a moment he had replaced the broken tool bit with a fresh one. Even as his hands automatically swung the spanner he was cursing himself. He should have seen the break coming.

He allowed himself to glance over his shoulder. Fore-Man Georg had turned around a hundred meters down the aisle. He was watching Smith. Smith waited for the Fore-Man's approach. But he didn't come. Instead, he saw the Fore-Man slowly shake his head from side to side.

From then on Smith forced himself to stop thinking. He watched with total absorption, the operations of the turret lathe. Like some inanimate monster it devoured the bars of nickel steel he poured into its head, and like a sick animal it disgorged its finished parts. Endlessly the process went on.

As much as Smith forced himself to concentrate on his charge the snaky inevitable thought insisted on intruding. It will never end. This will go on tomorrow and the day after and the day after that—unto the end of time. And you, Wurk-Man Smith, will stand in front of this machine and continue to make these parts until you become unable to see what you are doing and then *they'll* come and take you to the Aneasthesia Rooms and you'll disappear. And somebody will be assigned to your job until he too weakens. And this will go on and on and on.

It will be the same for a million times a million Smiths. That is what you were born to and that is what you'll serve. The City-State of Illine is your master and the Fore-Men are your guides. Be grateful that they allow you to serve them. Isn't that what you learned in the training time?

You musn't think about the Wurk-Man in Calline or the other City-States of Yorken, or Detrole, or Texanne, or even of the Wurk-Men in the enemy City-States.

Just wait until this shift is finished. Then you can go to the Commune barracks and eat a warm meal. And when your belly is full you can go to the Pleasure Place and vanish into the heaven of drug-induced dreams. Isn't that enough of a life? Just think, how delightful those dream sessions are. You don't see any other Wurk-Men who try to avoid the dreaming. They like it. Why don't you?

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Must you be different? Are you happy because you're different? You know you aren't. You're in agony and misery because you won't step into the pleasure places where all your troubles vanish. Instead you have to think and sneak into the forbidden tunnels.

The subconscious reveries went on all the while Smith attended to his machine. No other accidents happened though he knew he would hear about the broken tool.

The whistle shrilled, doors opened and a swarm of other Wurk-Men descended on the machines. As soon as his relief appeared, Smith walked toward the exit.

The weight of the day was gone and the next few hours were his. As he walked he felt the first relief of the day. He knew what was causing it and he knew he wasn't going to the Pleasure Place tonight just as he hadn't for the last thirty-five days. He knew it with a certainty. He knew he was going to get caught before long too, because his absence had been commented on by the Communal Barracks leader a number of times. The issue hadn't been made, but it was in the making. There was a craving within him for the thing he was going to do, a craving and desire which he couldn't understand at all. It had been said that before the dream-drugs had been invented, men craved drugs. Well, if that was so, he craved the new drug he had discovered.

WURK-MAN SMITH had almost reached the exit. The greater part of the milling crowd had gone; pathetic in the hopeless drabness they were hurrying toward their Communal Barracks—and thence to the Pleasure Places for their brief hour of delight.

"Wurk-Man Smith," a soft voice said at his elbow. He jerked at the words. Smooth and oily, the fat, grimacing face of Fore-Man Georg smiled at him.

"I'm going to have you examined tomorrow," the voice said blandly, "I think you *are* ill. And we can't have that, can we?" He patted Smith on the shoulder. "The City-State requires strong workers. We must win the War, musn't we?"

"Yes. Of course. Yes. But I—I—"

"Now don't you worry a bit, Wurk-Man Smith. We must guard our Wurk-Men's health. We'll have you fixed in a jiffy." He gave Smith another encouraging pat on the shoulder and strode away.

For an instant, an overpowering urge to smash his fat grinning face seized Smith. As the adrenalin worked on him, he felt such power as he hadn't imagined. Then as the Fore-Man disappeared, so did Smith's flare of anger. Futility heaped on futility!

Smith walked slowly to the Communal Barracks. Before he went to the eating rooms, he took a shower and luxuriated in the short sense of comfort afforded by discarding even for a moment, the harsh coarseness of the grey cloth uniform.

He ate a hasty tasteless meal, spooning the food into his mouth and gulping the milky fluid. All around him the animated chatter went on.

"Last night was wonderful. The Pleasure Place sent me into..."

"Yes, Fore-Man Greer said that I was the best Wurk-Man in the shop and he'd try to see if I could get promoted to..."

"Four times, Lanson broke the drill and do you know what they did about it?..."

"The news said a bomb hit the edge of the City-State of Brasilton—the destruction was wonderful..."

"I saw a Rocket-bomb hit last

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night by the Q-4 battery. They exploded it at thirty thousand meters. Isn't that wonderful?..."

"They'll never put a bomb in the center of Illine. Carton said he spoke with an Upper Fore-Man and he said that the Battery at A-11 had absolutely perfect accuracy..."

"The City-State of Moscone actually tried to land Wurk-Men—armed of course—in Detrole. Wasn't that ridiculous? They stopped that sort of thing twenty years ago. Detrole's Wurk-Men shot up the whole bunch with a blanket parabomb. Froze the whole gang stiff. They'll be executed tonight. The Pleasure Place will run a reel off before Dream time. That'll be fun..."

The voices around him were always the same. The victories and defeats. The bombs sent and the bombs which landed. The latest pleasures and the latest dreams. The quotas of work. The failures to meet the quotas and the grand rewards of exceeding them.

Again the urge came to Smith to fling his arms around and shout "you deluded fools—you poor deluded fools. Where are you going? Why don't you die and stop this nonsense. *I* could tell what life is all about—but you wouldn't understand!"

But he said nothing. He ignored the glances of the Wurk-Men who sensed his being different. He finished the tasteless food and left the crowded hall.

HE WAS conscious of the cool night air washing through the porous cloth that covered his body. And as it always did, the fear and anxiety which blanketed him during the day, vanished. The streets were empty save for an occasional person rushing to the Pleasure Places, desirous of not missing its share of film or music or dreaming.

Smith quickened his step. It would not do to appear as a loiterer. A patrol of Fore-Men might pick him up for questioning. Why aren't you in a pleasure place they would ask. And he would be unable to excuse his actions and they would take him and he would disappear. Though the thought seemed less horrible than before. He knew that tomorrow he was going to receive a thorough going-over—and very likely end up in Aneasthesia. The potential threat seemed remote. His mind didn't dwell on it. For the next few hours he was going to have the feel of being a man—not a Wurk-Man—but a simple ordinary man with an insatiable thirst for *knowing*, a thirst which was going to receive more quenching as it had been for the last many days—or nights.

The City-State was impressive. Except for the gaping flat areas he passed occasionally it consisted of vast groups of huge buildings housing Wurk-Men's Barracks, Pleasure Places, Shops and Factories and a few administrative buildings.

Here and there were monuments, usually on the site of a former building which had been hit by a bomb. Invariably the signs before the symbolic statues of stylized Wurk-Men or Fore-Men said: "Here on eleven, third month—of the seventy-second year of the City-State of Illine, a rocket bomb from Berline, destroyed three thousand brave Wurk-Men and a fuze manufactury. This criminal deed was avenged seven days later. Behold the site of the tragedy and remember it!"

Always the same trite phrases. And he knew that the identical sort of thing was done elsewhere—by the enemy too.

He passed an anti-rocket battery. It was a tall domed structure of steel re-inforced concrete from whose roof protruded a dozen tubes capable of

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erupting into furious discharges of anit-rocket projectiles. He could hear the hum of machinery within the building and the numerous radar antennae which studded the sides and roof repeated their endless rotations as they scanned the sky for orders.

The plan of the City-State was well known to Smith. These anti-rocket towers skirted the entire living area and they were just part of a vast network of similar devices which the other City-States, the friendly ones, used to relay information of enemy rockets.

Far to the north he saw a pin point of light moving against the stars. Simultaneously the tubes on the anti-rocket building moved, shuddered slightly and abruptly disgorged for hissing projectiles. The Seeker-Rockets vanished into the night at an incredible rate of speed. A minute passed, then five; a little nearer, now, the pin-point of light suddenly erupted into an incandescent flare and the sound of a gigantic clap of thunder smote Smith's ears. The interceptors had done their job.

It was all routine. It happened countless times each night and day and nobody paid any attention to the enemy rockets—except the rare ones which broke through the radar screen and which were not intercepted. Then a few thousand Wurk-Men disappeared in the terrible explosion.

The resultant inquiries weren't pleasant, Smith knew, for the anti-rocket crews who failed to catch the interloper. But life went on as before. If the building struck was of no consequence, or the area destroyed of no particular value, the inevitable plaque was erected. Otherwise the area was reconstructed and things were just as before.

Before he knew it, Smith was approaching his rendezvous. The buildings began to thin out. And finally the abandoned sections of the former city loomed up. The shattered slums, the habitat of a people long forgotten, forgotten by all save Smith. He knew what treasures lay here.

He moved as cautiously as possible knowing that while the likelihood of being picked up by a patrol was small, it was a possibility. He ducked into the shadows of a building the only remnants of which were walls. He crouched down and looked around. There was nothing moving. He was safe.

With the assurance that spoke familiarity, he walked along the drab debris-littered streets toward his goal. He entered the wreck of a building. Its walls were intact though its roof had long since crumpled in. It had been three stories high but the only usable portion was the cellar.

RATS SCURRIED away as Smith approached. He went down the cellar steps and into the darkness of the building. He walked through a door and found himself in the dear familiar room which had created him. He lit an oil lamp which was hanging from the door post and walked to the one battered chair which formed the room's only furnishings. He sat down, hung the lamp from a peg on the wall and inhaled the musty odor of the room exultantly.

His eyes lit first on his treasure trove, the cause and meaning of all his rebellion.

In one corner of the room, resting on two crude wooden shelves were several hundred *books*. Dirty, thumbed, smudged and falling apart, they presented a pathetic spectacle but to Smith's eyes, they were the sum total of the universe.

He got up, breathing heavily as if the emotion of being near the books

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was too much for him. He went slowly over to the shelves and selected a book, then another. He took the two of them back to the rotting chair and sat down. The oil lamp cast just enough light to read by.

There was something sensuous in Smith's movements as he ran his hands over the broken bindings of the books. His breath came rapidly. Finally he inhaled deeply and calmed himself. He was about to take a journey in time, a journey which would bring him to a world which until a few months ago he had not known existed.

He opened the first book. "History," it said, "The Second World War To The Formation of the City-States." He shut it.

The Second book was much thinner than the first. It read, "The City-States And the Perpetual War."

And then Smith followed his nightly ritual of reading. This abandoned library had furnished him with a reference point for thinking. Until that magnificent night when he had stumbled upon the place while seeking shelter from a particularly bad blast of bombs, he found himself in this haven. Since then, this was his life—and maybe his death.

The books had acquainted him with the whole course of human history, from the dawn of man until the creation of the Super-State in which man functioned as a cog, a sliver, in the gigantic machine.

It was here that Smith learned of the existence of the governing class of Upper Fore-Men who ruled the city-states and made war upon each other simply as a means of existing, not as an end in itself. War gave the City-States their economic reason for being.

Avidly Wurk-Man Smith continued his reading. To him a new vista was being disclosed, a vista which hitherto has been inconceivable. The title "Wurk-Man" and "Fore-Man" were clear to him now. Every inhabitant of a City-State was one or the other —but the gulf between them was large especially in the case of the "Upper Fore-Man." And he knew their function now—as parasites on a soulless existence.

Frequently he interrupted his reading to retrace his steps to the doorway of the building which he now occupied in order to assure himself that no light was visible and that no prowling patrols of Fore-Men were about. It was hard to do this because he became so lost in his reading that he forgot about the amenities.

Suddenly a shrill whistle blast split the air. In one motion, Smith doused the oil lamp and scuttled through the doorway of the room to the exit of the building along its side.

With skill borne of practice he stepped over and around the piles of rubble until he reached the concealment of a low wall. Here he crouched almost next to the street, safe from detection by the very obviousness of his haven.

A minute later he heard the clumping feet of the patrol. He peered through a crack in the brick wall and tried to make out the figures in the darkness. There were half a dozen men, some wearing the brassards of the Security Police, the others the simple insignia of the Anti-rockets units. The rocket men were armed with rifles. The Security Police held their deadly little paratubes before them.

Smith heard the senior officer shout: "It's no use. We'll stumble around here forever. I'll send in a patrol in the morning. They'll pick her up." With that the patrol reformed and Smith saw it moving off.

Cautiously he waited until the retreating footsteps could no longer be

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heard. *Her?* He was puzzled. It was so rare for a Wurk-Man to try and leave the city-state that the thought was difficult to digest. If she was being sought by the police, what could it have been for?

SMITH WAITED for another ten minutes. He neither saw nor heard anything. Finally he got up from his cramped position and returned to his secret shelter where the books were concealed.

He stepped through the familiar doorway into the blankness of the room. He reached out to relight the oil lamp.

Something slid around his throat, and a sharp point prodded him in the back.

"Don't move," a voice whispered, "don't move or I'll kill you." Smith stood stock-still. He breathed tremulously through parted lips. He said nothing. He behaved exactly as a citizen of the City-State of Illine.

Violence, in the sense of dread from bombs and enemy raiders was a common experience, but it was remote and impersonal withall, for City-State inhabitants knew it as something from without. In all his life Smith had never seen a human being angry with another. The Illines were completely composed whatever their destiny. All fire and force had been bred out of them. And Smith was no different. His seeking sanctuary here on the edge of the city did not mean that his rebellion was born of real hatred and anger of the type that would produce physical violence. He might think of it; he might hate momentarily, but he would never raise a hand to the authorities not even to Fore-Man Greer.

He didn't know what to make of his assailant.

She spoke again: "I'm going to let you light your oil lamp," she said in low tones, "but if you so much as move near me, I'll cut you faster than Aneasthesia can do it. Do you understand?"

Smith nodded. "I understand," he managed to croak out through parched lips.

He lit the oil lamp and turned to face his attacker, the refugee. He was startled by what he saw. The woman who confronted him was exactly like the thousands of machine workers. But there was a distinction. Her eyes shone in the dark. An aura of incredible power emanated from them as if she was accustomed to having her will.

She wore the sexless coveralls of the Wurk-Men. Her hair was clipped short and despite the pallor of her skin, Smith could sense the innate attractiveness of her—so different from the psuedo-sexual desire of the Pleasure Palaces and the Dream Rooms.

She was just a little shorter than he. Her face and clothes were dirty and she stood with a slight crouch like a cat ready to spring. Above all Smith saw the needle-bladed knife glittering in her hand. He recognized it at once. It had been ground from an old file into a stilletto.

The girl ran a hand through her grimy hair. She looked tired and hurt under the shell of anger she supported.

"I know you," she said slowly, "and if you behave I won't have to kill you."

Smith shook his head. The alien experience was beginning to excite him. "I'm not your enemy," he said, "I won't hurt you."

She laughed bitterly: "Of course you won't."

"I didn't mean that. I'm in trouble too." Smith was amazed that he should utter the unguarded syllables, before this stranger.

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"All right—you've seen me now. Douse the lamp."

Smith obeyed. He found himself admiring the commanding manner she possessed. No Wurk-Man, man or woman owned an attitude like hers. He found an exhilaration in the newness.

She sat down in the chair.

"Sit on the floor," she ordered. Smith obeyed. "I know you won't betray me for a while," she went on, "because I've been watching for five nights. I came here right after you left each time. I've been reading too."

"How did it happen that you were being chased by the Security Police?" Smith asked, relieved that he had nothing but conversation to worry about. At first he had feared her hostility.

"My name is Stella," the girl said. "You must have heard the commotion five days ago when I struck Fore-Man Stang."

"I didn't," Smith said and he was thinking, *I* was too occupied with my own problem to even know what was going on.

"Well, I did it," the girl reiterated, "and they sent me to Anaesthesia. I broke away and I've been hiding ever since living on anything I can get hold of."

THEN THE smouldering fire of rebellion that had just nudged Smith in the past, broke into a burst of furious activity. For the second time in less than a few weeks he had a striking thought. His whole scale of values was changing so rapidly. The jelly-fish existence of a Wurk-Man held no appeal whatsoever. His intellectual processes were fermenting.

"Stella," he said quietly, "I want to escape with you. I'll help. Together we might be able to get away."

The girl drew back alarmed as he could tell by her sudden intake of breath and the rustling of her coveralls.

"What do you mean?" she demanded sharply.

And then Smith told her. He told her of his altercation with the Fore-Man. He told her what had happened inside him when he discovered what life was all about. The little library had tipped his entire world over and made it impossible for him to be a slave to the drab futile existence he was undergoing.

Stella listened through the entire speech which assumed, after a time, the proportions of a tirade. And she sympathized completely.

The next hour's conversation lifted the two tiny gears in the vast war-machine that was Illine, the City-State, into a state of near ecstasy. As yet they had only begun to realize their potentialities as humans.

"We'll have to stop talking Stella," Smith said. "It's getting late and if we're going to leave here at all, we'd better go now. It won't be too long before they'll have the patrols out and they'll find this place for certain." Even as he said the words he felt a strange burst of pride that he should be making such an original proposal and he couldn't understand the brief burst of pride that knifed through him when Stella acquiesced so readily, almost as if *he* were the rebel the patrol was searching for instead of her.

There was nothing to take with them. Stella had her knife. Smith had nothing but his skinny bare hands. But alone among the inhabitants of Illine, they possessed the priceless ingredient—courage.

Stella preceded Smith through the doorway. He took a last lingering glance at the darkness which sheltered the source of his knowledge, the pitifully beaten books. They had been the key. He wondered if

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Stella felt the same and he almost asked her. But something held him back. There was still a measure of reserve. The City-State had never encouraged social intercourse in any form other than interest in the progress of the inevitable war.

They walked through the darkness hugging the walls and pavements of the ruined section of the city, taking the direction which Stella assured Smith was the one way out. They made no sound except occasionally to whisper to each other. They walked carefully picking their way amidst the shattered remnants of buildings.

Once in a while they would accidentally touch each other, and the feel of Stella's hand did something to Smith, a something which he understood only vaguely.

Now and then they would hear the sound of a careless confident patrol making its rounds. When that happened they would immediately drop to the ground seeking to blend with the rubble. They would wait until the patrol passed and then resume their progress. Patrols were infrequent and not at all watchful. For what was there to watch? The enemy rarely ever attempted a suicide mission. And runaway rebellious Wurk-Men were unheard of—until now.

Probably by tomorrow Smith thought fearfully and excitedly at the same time, the city-state would be combed from top to bottom in an effort to unearth them. Such a thing as refugees was unheard of, completely unheard of.

THE BUILDINGS began to thin out considerably, a certain indication the edge of the city was being reached. They both became more alert. It was now that the possibility of running into trouble was greatest. In addition they could see one last anti-rocket tower looming up in the distance. They would have to be extremely careful now.

They had to leave the city before dawn broke or they'd be sure to be spotted by helicopter crews. Once outside the city there'd be a chance to get into woods somewhere or into a rocket crater amidst the pock-marked and pitted land. There they might stand a chance.

In the darkness, Smith thrilled suddenly to the touch of Stella's hand on his shoulder. He stopped as the pressure increased. The girl put her lips to his ear.

"Look!" she whispered, "over there." Her hand pointed. In the darkness it was hard for Smith to make out the figure toward which she was pointing. His eyes had spent too much time gazing at a rotating machine. Finally he caught the sight.

A few hundred feet away, planted right squarely in the middle of the pitted street littered with the fragments of bomb broken houses, stood a patrolman. Smith couldn't make out whether he was a rocket man or not.

"We can't get by him," she said softly. And she looked into his eyes. Then she held up her stilletto. "I've got to do it, Smith," she said. "Otherwise, he'll report us. We can't possibly lie out of it."

Smith looked at her for a moment. He gazed into her clear eyes. Something passed through him, a feeling of revulsion and triumph for what he was about to do.

He put his fingers to his lips signifying silence. Then he reached out and gently disengaged the blade from Stella's hand. Reluctant at first, she released it. Then she saw the light in his eyes and she smiled. Smith took the blade.

"Talk to him," he said grimly, "and I'll come up behind him."

Stella walked away immediately.

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She got within twenty feet of the soldier before she was halted.

"Who's there?" he called loudly. "Come forward and be recognized!"

"I'm lost," Stella called out. "I don't know where I am."

The guard hearing a woman's voice feared nothing, though he would not have feared a Wurk-Man either. He held his paratube in his right hand loosely. Mentally he was welcoming the opportunity to talk with somebody. It would be three hours yet before the 'copter would come to pick him up and this outpost was lonely.

When he saw Stella approaching he felt remarkably glad. This was going to be a pleasant tour of duty.

"What happened?" he asked jovially, "too much time in the Dream Rooms?" He chuckled at his own humor. "Everyone gets dizzy now and then. But how did you get out here?"

Stella approached close to him. She shrugged. "I don't know," she said. "It just happened. One minute I was leaving the Dream Rooms at the North Pleasure Palace and a half hour ago I found myself here. What do I do now?"

"Just wait here with me for..." The next words were choked in his throat. Smith's arm lashed around the guard's neck effectively preventing any outcry though this wasn't really necessary. At the same instant the guard's body stiffened and then convulsed violently as Smith's right hand drove the crude home made dagger into his back.

Smith stepped back. His face was white and he was trembling. He had not only used violence—he had killed a man! Now the course was irrevocable. The girl looked at him with understanding. She stepped up to him and seized his vibrating hand in hers. The stilletto fell from nerveless fingers.

"I know," Stella said compassionately. "It is a terrible feeling. But it had to be done."

"I feel so strange," Smith said in a trance-like voice, "I—I—"

He stopped abruptly. The enormity of his crime, the running from the City-State, the hours with the books, the meeting with the girl—all flashed through his mind. He braced himself. He was committed.

He shook his head. Then he bent down and picked up the bloody instrument. He wiped it on the guard's clothing and put it in his pocket. He moved calmly, the initial horror dissappated.

"Come," he said shortly, "It'll be dawn before long. We must get away from here." Obediently, Stella followed him. Neither glanced a second time at the guard's body.

THE NEXT TWO hours were a nightmare of hurry and indecision. Finally they were well away from the city and deep into the wooded surrounding sections. At least they were invisible for the most part from the air, though some snooping helicopter could detect them if it flew low enough.

"Stella," Smith said as he and the girl crouched in a vast hole that had been made by a rocket bomb and which was now a mass of thicket, "they'll spare no pains to hunt us down. They'll know we killed the guard. We've violated the code and we'll be chased."

Stella shrugged. There was no despair on her face. While they were but a minute's flight from the city by air, they still had a fighting chance.

"Smith," she said, looking at him quizzically in the early morning glow that preceded daybreak, "are you sorry it all happened?"

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Up until this moment, Smith's normally pale face had been almost blue as from an inward terror. Then as the girl asked the question everything seemed to fall into place. This id make sense. The confusion wasn't here. He had to learn to think like a free man not like a Wurk-Man. Somehow he would manage to live—maybe even Stella would stay with him—maybe even...

He looked up at her and there was pride in his sunken eyes. "I'm glad it happened," he said intensely. "I'm glad. I'm glad!" He shook his fist at the direction of the city. "Even if we have to die!"

"No," Stella said, "We won't think that way at all. Why should we have to die? The City-State isn't everything. For all we know, maybe others have escaped too."

"I never thought of that," Smith said. "I've been thinking we were doing something so very strange. Maybe others thought the same. But we never heard about it."

"Of course not," Stella said, "you don't think the Fore-Men would talk about it and tell us, do you?"

The dawn broke clear and fair. It was early summer and because vision was so clear, it would be impossible for the two to move during the day. They must remain crouched in their shelter. For the time they should be safe.

The time passed slowly and the agonies of thirst and hunger gradually crept up on them. There was no water nor had they any food. Parched and hungry they could only sit miserably and wait for time to pass. The only motion was the swaying of tree limbs under the wind—except for the occasional and distant sight and sound of a rocket bomb being exploded in the air and sneaking through the anti-rocket towers into the city-state.

At first Smith and Stella conversed animatedly but as time wore on thirst and ennui and terror—unspoken but alive—i n t r u d e d. So through the course of the long day they remained in the thicket watching, dozing fitfully and waiting. Everytime they saw a 'copter overhead their faces blanched, but none descended. Gradually the day passed and the thickening shadows of nightfall brought promise of relief—as well as escape.

As soon as darkness came Smith and Stella left the entanglement of their shelter and resumed their journey to the West. It was imperative that they remain near the road using it as a guide. Their training had provided no woodsmanship. Operating a lathe for a lifetime does not consider outdoor living.

They stayed off the edge of the the road by a hundred feet, preferring discomfort to detection. Unless chance intervened they should stand a good chance of getting away.

"Listen," Stella said suddenly. Smith strained and his ears caught the soft *sluff-sluff* of 'copter blades.

Terror-stricken he gasped out one word: "Run!"

Seizing Stella by the hand Smith ran like one possessed. The two ran along the ditch that bordered the road. There was a soft *whoosh* and the rubber-tired wheel of the 'copter tore the girl from Smith's grasp. She gave an agonized shout as the wheel struck her side and then she collapsed into unconsciousness.

The 'copter landed with a light bounce a few feet away and Smith saw the grinning faces of the guards. One lifted his paratube to ray the rebel.

IN THE short moment of the tragedy Smith felt such anger and hatred course through him as de-

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fied analysis. Without thinking, he moved. As the adrenalin shot through his body, he bent down and in one swift motion picked up a heavy boulder lying on the ground and flung it with terrific force at the guard with the paratube. The jagged rock struck the man in the face, bowling him over the side of the open-seated 'copter.

Smith couldn't think clearly. He only knew that Stella had been struck down. In one instant he vaulted the distance between the 'copter and himself. Like a wild cat he was on the astonished patrolman. Surprised, the man fumbled for his paratube, but his soft muscles reacted too slowly. Smith was no paragon of strength; indeed he was a shadow of a man, but he was infused with such a blood lust that nothing could stand before him.

His hands were around the guard's throat, choking and tearing, his stilletto forgotten in the passion of hate. Furiously he pressed, forcing the man's head against the side of the 'copter seat. For a short while the guard struggled with the desperation of the knowledge of death, but his flurries were of no avail against the momentary superhuman strength of Smith. Finally the man's body went limp.

The only sound in the night was soft hissing of the idling blades overhead. Embittered and confused with grief and anxiety, Smith bent over the girl's body. He put his hand over her heart. Thank God! She was still alive, but she made no sound.

Still consumed with confusion, Smith glanced wildly around. What to do? This was not the time or place for rationalizations. Gently he lifted Stella into the 'copter, flinging the strangled guard's body over the side. The control board and levers of the 'copter were a mystery to him. Yet a certain innate mechanical intelligence guided him. Still dazed he pulled a few levers.

The blades overhead swung into a smoother hiss. To his amazement, Smith found the 'copter rising slowly. Gingerly he toyed with other parts of the controls.

Even though the exhaustion of reaction was setting in, Smith forced himself to experiment. To his surprise he found that little skill was needed to guide the 'copter. Had he thought he might have realized that this was to be expected. He had never encountered any guards with very high intelligence standards.

Seeing that the 'copter would fly itself to all intents and purposes, Smith leaned back a moment to quiet the trembling in his legs and the fluttering of his stomach. He looked at Stella. She was breathing softly. He bent over her. There was an ugly bump on the side of her head and when he opened her coveralls, he could see the nasty bluish bruise that covered her side where the major force of the 'copter wheel had expended itself.

He searched the 'copter's small compartment and found nothing but a small canteen of water. Gratefully he poured some between her lips and was rewarded by the fluttering of her eyelids. Abruptly she sat up, then almost fainted back again as the pain of her bruises touched her consciousness.

Sudden realization of their position struck her. She glanced again at the whirling blades overhead. In sudden alarm, she flung herself against Smith and winced with pain.

"Don't be afraid." Smith mouthed soft words of comfort and held the frightened girl tenderly. His weariness dropped from him. All the terrors they had endured seemed worthwhile. This was the way things

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should be. He found himself caressing the girl's hair. The grime and dirt seemed almost as a badge of honor after sterile cleanliness.

SHORTLY they were capable of coherent thought. Smith resumed control of the 'copter. He had no means of navigation other than the lights of the City-State they had so recently escaped. Shrewdly moving so as to make these lights decrease and finally vanish, Smith knew he was putting a great distance between the source of his horror—and his joy.

The 'copter sped on through the night, a few hundred feet above the ground. Deliberately Smith sought the low altitude to avoid possible spotting by any distant guard though the danger of encountering such a guard by chance was greater. But since they rarely wandered far from the City-State, Smith knew that to all practical intents and purposes they had made good the thing he had feared would never happen—successful escape.

The water went rapidly and both Stella and he were in acute discomfort from hunger and thirst. Stella's bruises burned like fire and Smith's actions had completely enervated him. Like two stolid beasts they crouched in the 'copter letting it carry them away from the City-State, knowing that it would be best not to land any sooner than necessary.

Soon they dozed off into the drowsy fitful sleep of exhaustion.

Smith jerked awake. The 'copter was still moving along at a good clip, the blades hissing overhead, the motor purring smoothly. The three hours of fitfull rest had taken the edge off his fatigue though the hunger and thirst were worse. He looked at Stella. She was breathing deeply and calmly in spite of her hurts.

His heart warmed to her. He could feel his despair vanishing at the mere thought that he knew her.

Then out of the darkness came a sound. Smith looked around wildly. Again came the flat *crack*. He spotted the marauders at once. A half mile away and coming at a good clip were the running lights of another 'copter!

Again came the *crack*. The guards were firing at them! Despair washed over Smith, but the appeal of the dozing girl did something to him. Before he might have surrendered at the first sign of pursuit. With her coming, all that was changed. Only one thought obsessed him. He had to escape. He had to.

He seized the controls of the 'coptor and speeded it up. In a burst of speed it started to outdistance the pursuers. The gunfire continued. Twice Smith, terror-stricken and yet cool, the perfect paradox of the mouse turned lion, heard shots spang against the aluminum sides of the 'coptor.

Stella, awakened by the noise and changing motion, looked around. She saw Smith manipulating the controls. She was too sore and stiff and hurt to move much. All she could do was lie there.

Smith glanced at her and saw she was awake. At the same time her face broke into a pain-twisted smile. That was enough. Smith turned his energies to the 'coptor.

He dared not let the 'coptor of the Fore-Men get at all close for then their bad marksmanship wouldn't matter. And there was the short range paratubes to worry about.

The two machines sped through the night, the one a few hundred yards behind the other. Once Smith tried an evasive manuever but he lost so much distance through his clum-

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siness that he dared not try it again. Instead he persisted in the straight race. Once or twice he gained distance. But each time the other matched it.

The gunfire had ceased as if the Fore-Men guards knew that they were bound to take the refugees. They could afford to sweep down on the fleeing pair. They need fear no weapons.

Then that happened which Smith feared most. The engine of the 'coptor began to sputter. It alternately ran smooth and raggedly. He knew it was a matter of minutes before the fuel was gone.

Abruptly the motor stopped. Stella arose to a sitting position. Fear replaced pain in her eyes. Overhead the blades whirled slowly and the 'coptor began to settle gently toward the earth. The pursuing craft sped rapidly toward them as they descended.

Smith crouched with Stella behind the side of the 'coptor, offering no target to the paraguns even at close range. The pursuers would have to board.

Smith's hand clenched convulsively around the haft of the home-made stilletto. "We'll die, Stella," he said his voice vibrant with desperation, but in his heart he knew they'd be caught and taken back to Illine.

"Yes," whispered the girl and there were tears in her eyes. "Kill me now, please!" Smith looked at her with horror, and pity. The thought hadn't touched his mind. "No!" he said savagely. "We have a chance yet!"

Another time and another place might have inspired him with the same thought, but here and now—never! Stella was his inspiration and she was demanding the impossible.

Then the 'coptor touched the ground and the blades stopped their hissing and remained still. A few seconds later, the Fore-Men were alongside and the leading figure spotted the crouching Smith.

EVEN AS Fore-Man Georg brought up his paratube to freeze and capture the runaways, Smith launched his wiry body in a spring-like leap. He shot forward, stilletto in hand. The mocking look on Georg's face changed for a moment to fear. He pressed the stud on the paratube and Smith's leap carried him in a stiff heap over the edge of the control pit where he hung like a trussed chicken, helpless to move, consciousness and will gone. The numbing shock of the paratube had blanked out another rebel for an hour.

Stella waited for the paralyzing force, helpless to fight.

Georg looked at her and laughed: "You didn't think you could defy the City-State?" he asked; he laughed again. "What fools!" He turned to his two companions. "We'll take them both back," he said. "The Punishment Rooms will want to see them."

He turned away and at the same instant, Stella heard the unmistakable sharp *crack* made by only one weapon. A rifle shot burst out of the darkness. Before the girl's eyes, Georg suddenly stopped his movement. A funny smile spread over his face and Stella saw a round little hole in the man's forehead. Before the astonished guards could move more shots rang out...it was over... Stella blacked out as fatigue and shock overwhelmed her nervous system.

Smith came to slowly and glanced around him. His eyes widened as he saw what was happening.

It seemed like dozens of men, dressed in the ragged well-worn clothing of Wurk-Men were scurry-

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ing around him. He saw the tangled heap of three bodies—the Fore-Men laying in the stiffened attitude of death. The men were working madly he could see now to take the two 'coptors apart. Their wrenches and their tools never ceased moving.

Smith dragged his slowly recovering body to where Stella lay. One of the men was bathing her face with water. Smith looked at his muscular physique, his confident manner and marveled.

"Relax, friend," the man said, "we'll take care of you. The girl'll be all right too. Some Fore-Men hate the City-States too."

The man had a peculiar accent. He must be from another City-State maybe an enemy one, Smith thought. But aren't they all alike? What are they doing trying to revive us.

Then the meaning dawned on him!

"Do you mean," he asked in a desperate whisper, "that you're all free, that you've all run away from the City-States?" Incredulously he waited for the answer.

The man smiled: "Of course," he said, "there are colonies over underground refugees all over the country, and we manage to do pretty well.

"The City-States let us have plenty of equipment and weapons." He gestured toward the sprawled bodies of the Fore-Men. "See what I mean?"

Smith nodded dumbly and a fierce incomprehensible joy spread through him. It had paid to fight, to have courage! He knew where he was going at last—if they'd have him. The sobering thought made him reflect.

"Will Stel—the girl and I have a chance to stay with you people?" he asked timidly.

"Ha!" the man snorted, "you've got to. You don't think we'd let loose of two people like you. We hate the Fore-Men, you know. Of course, you'll have to take a thorough check—we don't want any Fore-Men spies with us, but from what we've seen you'll do all right."

Smith nodded gratefully. Stella's eyelids began to flutter. She came to quickly. Smith reached out and took her hand. He put his finger to his lips.

"Don't talk Stella," he said softly, "we're safe now—and forever." His eyes wandered to the side. The 'coptors were a mass of metal parts which the freemen were carrying away. The only sign of the incident was the bodies of the Fore-Men. They wouldn't be there long. Smith saw the large hole being dug.

"We're safe, Stella," he repeated, and his tongue fumbled for the unfamiliar word he once had read, "—we've found a sanctuary..."

THE END

★ OYSTER-CATCHER ★

SOMEBODY always gets a brilliant idea—usually from a simple thing. Consider the latest method of harvesting oysters. Hitherto this has been a tedious bed-sweeping method that has been inefficient. Now a new method is used, one which is so simple as to defy explanation as to its origin.

A gigantic vacuum cleaner is used to sweep the bottom of the shore-line where the beds of oysters lay. The powerful suction hose with a wide nozzle on the end sucks up water and oysters, passes the water through a filter and retains the oysters. It is a huge rubber and steel machine that can drag up a thousand bushels of oysters an hour!

Actually it is using a technique employed by the whale which sweeps through the sea with open mouth, absorbing schools of fish and ejecting the water. That this gigantic vacuum cleaner will be used to trap other creatures of the sea is undeniable. What chance has a fish these days? First they use sonar to track down the fish—then they scoop him up in all-sweeping nets. Now some human wishes to vacuum them. In all the world is there no suitable opponent for Man? —*Pete Bogg*

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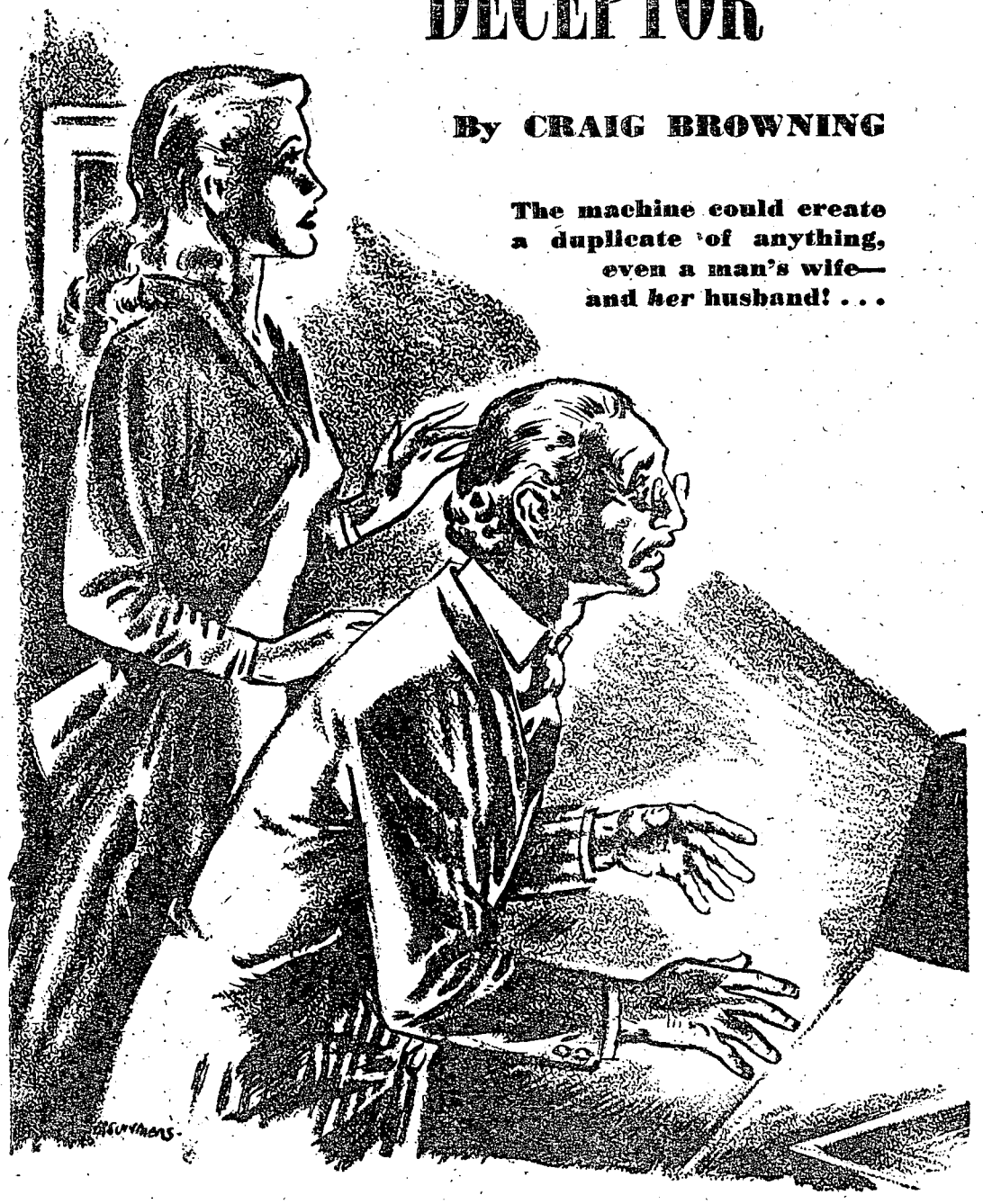
The EXTEROCEPTOR DECEPTOR

By CRAIG BROWNING

The machine could create a duplicate of anything, even a man's wife— and *her* husband! . . .



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THE YOUNG man sighed deeply and turned away from the brightly lit theater front. He was lonesome. He was a long ways away from home and his wife, Mary. And his name was John.

He could see her in his mind's eye as he strolled almost blindly along the street. She would be wearing a cute house dress that somehow always looked nicer on her than the finest of expensive dresses looked on other women. Her generous blonde waves would somehow seem to be a combination of heaven and earth even when they were mussed. Her lips would be inviting, perhaps a little wistful. Her eyes would be pools of blue mystery that could light up like angel fire.

He sighed deeply again. The sigh was interrupted by sudden, rather

The air seemed to shimmer above the machine, and then a figure began to materialize . . .

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jarring contact with someone.

"Pardon me," John said instinctively, making a grab for the rather slight figure that was rebounding from him.

His fingers managed to grasp an almost hollow coat sleeve and hang on. The stranger swayed slightly, his sparse frame held up by John's steady hand.

John smiled into the rather pale, slightly out of focus eyes that searched his face.

"Sall right," the drunk said, waving his hand airily. "People always bump into me. Used to it."

He peered blearily at John. The picture he presented reminded John of a rather seedy Love Bird belonging to a neighbor. But also, there was an undefinable air of respectableness in the drunk. His sparse gray hair was neatly combed. His suit was —or had been a little earlier in the day—freshly pressed. His age was somewhere over fifty, his weight somewhere around a hundred pounds.

"How about joining me in a drink?" John asked on impulse. He regretted the impulse as soon as he gave way to it, but it was too late. The drunk had heard him.

He backed off a step and bowed politely. "Honor'sh all mine, m'boy," he said. Which it was.

IT WAS half an hour and two bottles of beer later. John had found the little man a rather comfortable companion, chatting away to himself without apparently caring whether John listened or not, and John barely paid attention to the chatter, his thoughts more and more lonesome for his wife, Mary. And the knowledge that it would be several weeks before his business was concluded so he could return home didn't help matters.

"Extro—exter—extero," the mumbling drunk's voice broke into John's thoughts.

"What's that?" he asked dreamily.

"Exteroceptor deceptor," the drunk said, then blinked in surprise at having managed to say it so clearly.

"Exteroceptor deceptor?" John said. "What in the world is that?"

"'S a machine," the drunk said sagely. "Ninstrument. My invention."

"Oh," John said understandingly. "You're an inventor."

"No no no no," the drunk said. "Schientist. Dr. Horace Featherstone." He half rose and held out his hand.

"Glad to know you, doctor," John said. "I'm John Heathers, connected with the Acme Leather Belt Company. Now what were you saying about an—what did you call it?"

"Exteroceptor deceptor," Horace said, his tongue retaining the skill it had stumbled upon.

"What does that name mean?" John asked, slightly interested.

"The exteroceptors are your nerves that bring you outside impressions," Horace explained, his voice slow and deliberate, as his walk would have been if he were walking. "Your retinal nerves, auditory nerves, touch, taste, smell. They work on wavelengths," he added vaguely.

"Oh, I get it," John said. "The exteroceptor deceptor would be something that creates illusions."

"The FIRST one was," Horace said. "THIS one is an improved model."

"Oh?" John said. "Who sells them?"

Horace sat back and looked blearily at John, trying to force his doped face muscles into an expression of disgust.

"You don't buy them," he finally said, gulping the last of his beer and leaving a moustache of foam on his upper lip. "I just perfected it. Wan-

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na see it work?"

"Sure," John agreed, thinking to himself that anything to pass the time would be worth seeing.

IT WAS AN upstairs apartment over a bakery, a single flight of noisy board steps leading up to it. John was surprised at its neatness, and surmised correctly that a housekeeper had probably gone over it sometime during the day.

His feeling toward the mousy Horace suddenly included a modicum of respect as he saw the several framed college degrees on the walls of the living room. Perhaps after all the man was not a wino, but merely a respectable scientist on a bender. The new respect made him interested in the exteroceptor deceptor. There was now a possibility that it might be something.

Horace had disappeared into another room. He returned with something resembling a portable radio in his hand. He set it carefully on the coffee table.

"This is it," he said, more sober now, the short walk from the beer parlor having worked off some of the alcohol in his system. "When I turn it on all you have to do is imagine something and it will materialize right in front of you. Wanna beer?"

"O.K.," John said.

Horace turned a knob on the exteroceptor deceptor. He frowned at the thing a moment—and suddenly there were two bottles of beer and two glasses resting on the coffee table.

Horace looked at John triumphantly, picked up one of the bottles and a glass and handed them to John.

Into John's mind came the sudden wish that Mary were there to have a beer with him. Instantly Mary stood beside him, smiling at him.

Only it was a slightly different Mary. Her lips were somehow redder, her eyes much bluer, her face more beautiful, her hair more ethereal, her form more—well, more.

There was a surprised gasp from Horace. He stabbed at the exteroceptor deceptor ineffectively several times and finally managed to shut it off. The bottles of beer and the glasses vanished.

Mary seemed to blur for an instant, then returned to full density and reality.

"Something's wrong!" Horace muttered. He turned the exteroceptor back on.

"Please," Mary said pleadingly, placing her hand on Horace's arm. "Don't wish me out of existence."

"Is that what you were going to do?" John asked belligerently.

"Now take it easy. Take it easy," Horace said, backing off. "I'm afraid of girls."

"You don't need to be afraid of Mary," John said. "She's my wife. Mary, meet Horace."

"Pleased to meet you, Horace," Mary said, batting her eyelashes demurely.

"Same here," Horace said. "Only," he turned his eyes earnestly to John. "She isn't really your wife. She's an imagimary Mary. I mean an imaginary Mary."

"Imagi-Mary," John said. "Say! That's a nice name." He looked at her. Suddenly he and she were laughing delightedly.

"Let's all have a beer," Horace said, playing the host.

JOHN OPENED his eyes with a vague recollection of having had wild dreams, and with a splitting headache. He lay there, trying to recall the dreams. Something about a machine called an exteroceptor deceptor. Funny how the mind can in-

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vent words when one is asleep. And there was something else—a dream girl just like Mary, only more so—and he had called her Imagimary.

He could appreciate all that better if he didn't have such a headache, and anyway he'd better get up and get to work. Funny, though. The drinking had been in the dream, and there was a splitting headache.

He groaned and turned over. His rumpled hair suddenly seemed to acquire muscles.

Imagimary stretched with luxurious ease and smiled at John. She had either just put lipstick on or her lips were naturally redder and more beautiful than they should be. Her hair too. It was rumpled from sleeping—but even rumpled it had those subtle, masterful touches that made it seem the latest thing from an exclusive Fifth Avenue beauty shop.

A question of morals rose into John's mind—unresolvable. It instantly made his head ache worse.

"Darling," Imagimary said, holding out her arms.

"Ohhhh," John groaned.

"Oh, you have a headache. That's a shame," Imagimary said soothingly.

She took his head in her arms. He lay there and made the necessary adjustments in his conscience to include such things. After all, he decided, she IS my wife Mary—just as I have always thought of her in my mind, not as she really is.

* * *

Three days went by—slowly, from the events packed into them, swiftly from the standpoint of interval. In some way John managed to take care of his business duties. The problem of writing Mary was—well, a problem, since it had to be done every day.

How to write her when a more perfect she was standing at one's shoulder, running electric fingers through one's hair? He wrote, "I love you, Mary," and wondered. He wrote, "I miss you, Mary," and knew it was an outright lie. He wrote, "I'm looking forward to the day I can come home," and knew with a sinking feeling that that was the ONE thing he was NOT looking forward to.

And when he finished the letter he read it over and hated every word of it. So he tore it up and started over. He began, "Dearest Mary," then was hit by an inspiration.

Why not tell Mary the truth? Imagimary was the counterpart of the real Mary. He was not lonesome with Imagimary near him. Sure! Why not tell Mary the gospel truth, leaving out only the fact that Imagimary was now real flesh and blood, made so by a gadget that looked like a portable radio and was called an exteroceptor deceptor? So he did. It made a nice "imaginative" letter that she would read without realizing it was more—much more—than mere fantasy!

That was the first day's letter. The second day he carried it on. The third day he was in the process of writing when the phone rang.

It was the desk clerk. His polite voice camly dropped its atomic bomb without being aware of what it did. Mary herself was in the lobby, and on her way up!

"Mary's here!" John exploded, looking wildly around for some place to hide Imagimary.

"Oh, that's wonderful," Imagimary cooed. "I'd love to meet her."

"You don't understand," John said desperately. "She wouldn't understand."

THE KNOCK on the door was ominous—the knock of doom, John thought. He shoved Imagimary into the closet and ordered her to stay

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there and keep quiet, then went to the door and opened it.

"Darling," Mary said dramatically, holding out her arms. She was plain and drab, even with her new hairdo and new dress. Her lipstick glittered with artificial gloss. Her bright blue eyes were not quite bright enough.

As she rushed into John's arms he wondered dismally what he had ever seen in her.

"Your letter was such a DARLING letter," she murmured in his ear. "I thought I would reward you by coming down to be with you for a few days."

John felt the sudden constricting of Mary's arms and knew what it presaged even before he heard the tones of Imagimary's musical voice.

"So this is Mary," it said. "How interesting." The last was the smooth purring of a cat. It dawned on John that Imagimary could be jealous too.

Mary's arms withdrew from his shoulders slowly. She stepped around him into the room. He turned and watched as Mary, in her chic street outfit, and Imagimary, in her sheer gown, stood inspecting each other.

"You DO look like me," Mary said in a wondering tone. "I suppose I should consider it a compliment that when John PLAYS AROUND he picks girls that remind him of me—vaguely."

"On the contrary," Imagimary purred. "You see, I read his letters to you over his shoulder while he wrote them. I am really you, my dear—without the imperfections."

"Yeah. Yeah, that's right," John said desperately, sensing a way out. "You see, Mary, Imagimary was brought into existence by means of a gadget an inventor invented. She's really you, the way I always think of you—perfect."

"Oh, I see," Mary said grimly. "Perfect, is it. Well, just where is this inventor with his invention. As long as you're making it good, you might as well bring him out and let him speak his piece."

Mary listened, almost half believing, as Horace patiently explained about his exteroceptor deceptor.

"You see," a more or less sober Horace was saying. "Matter is really made up of waves—energy—like light is, or the electircity going through a radio set. Material structures have their own peculiar wavelengths. So do thoughts. What my exteroceptor deceptor does is take the thought-energy complex and amplify it, projecting it into a space-time energy pattern. The space-time energy field holds its shape through a sort of heterodyning effect, carried on by the exteroceptor deceptor.

"In the case of Imagimary," he said, "the initial heterodyning, carried on through the deceptor, shorted out, and she continued to exist after I shut off the thing."

Imagimary stood to one side, her red lips smiling, a glass of beer in her hand. John was shifting uncomfortably from one foot to another.

"How about turning the exteroceptor on and demonstrating," Mary said. She smiled disarmingly at Horace.

"Be glad to," he said, jumping over to it. "Takes a second or two to warm up."

He looked at it intently. Suddenly a glass of beer materialized on the coffee table beside it. Horace picked it up and handed it to Mary.

"Taste it," he suggested. "Of course, it isn't like the real thing. You can get drunk on it while the machine is on, but when you shut the machine off it all ceases to exist, wherever it is, and you sober up again right away. That's why I stick to the real thing."

Mary accepted the glass and tast-

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ed it thoughtfully. She looked at the exteroceptor deceptor through veiled lids.

Suddenly there was a fifth person present in the room. He looked remarkably like John, except that he was a trifle taller, more broadshouldered, his features a trifle more handsome, his hair richer in color.

"Mary!" John gasped.

"Spfff," Horace said, blowing beer over the rug from the glass he was drinking out of.

"Hello-o," Mary purred at the newcomer.

Peals of delighted laughter came from Imagimary.

"Hello, darling," the newcomer said to Mary. His voice was like John's, but with richer and deeper quality.

"Mary; you can't DO this," John said.

"Why not?" she said coyly. "You have the perfect answer to your dreams. Why shouldn't I?"

She turned back to the newcomer thoughtfully.

"John calls his imaginary Mary Imagimary," she said slowly. "I think I'll call you—Imagination John, or Imaginajohn." She nodded her head emphatically. "Imaginajohn."

"Maybe he won't survive the shutting off of the exteroceptor," John suggested hopefully to Horace.

Horace shut it off. Imaginajohn remained, though he blurred momentarily. He frowned at John.

"That was a rather unfair thing to do," he said. "How would you like it if I tried to make YOU vanish?"

"It isn't the same thing," John said hotly. "Mary, you've got to get rid of that Imagi—Imaginajohn. Is that really the way I look to you?"

"I won't get rid of him," Mary said. "In fact, I like the idea. Keep your old Imagimary. I'll stick to my Imaginajohn."

Suiting her action to her words, she hooked her arm in that of Imaginajohn and said, "Let's get out of this place, darling."

At the door she paused for a final parting shot.

"Get rid of that—that Imagimary creature," she said. "Then and not until then will I consider coming back to you."

There was a slam, and the sound of sharp heels going down the stairs.

WOMANLIKE, Mary was not satisfied with the way things were going. She and Imaginajohn rented a room in the same hotel as John. The room clerk thought at first it was some kind of joke.

"Why do you two want another room?" he asked. "You already have one."

"Not us," Mary said hastily. "That's my husband that has the room—I mean," she took a deep breather. "My husband's," she smiled sweetly at Imaginajohn. "Twin brother. This is Imaginajohn."

"Oh," the clerk said, sniffing the air for signs of alcohol, and finding them. "And this man here, Imaginajohn, he's your husband?"

"Well," Mary hesitated. "Yes. Of course. What do you think I am?"

"O.K., O.K.," the room clerk said, realizing the trap laid for him. He turned the register book around and handed Mary a pen.

With the problem of the room out of the way, Mary marked time until dinner time, then took Imaginajohn with her to the dining room. She searched the tables until she found John and Imagimary, and asked the head waiter for the vacant table next to them.

"Oh, hello, John," she said as she sat down, pretending to be surprised.

"Why don't you join us, Mary," Imagimary suggested.

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"No thank you," Mary said icily. "If I had noticed you two were in here I'm sure I would have gone somewhere else to eat—wouldn't we have, Imaginajohn?"

"I'm sure we would have, Mary," Imaginajohn said, winking imperceptibly to Imagimary. "And come to think of it, Mary darling, what did you ever see in John? He's rather a drab person in my estimation."

Mary looked at John, then back to Imaginajohn.

"Yes," she said. "He is, isn't he. I'd never quite noticed it before."

"And John dear," Imagimary spoke up. "I've been wondering what you ever saw in Mary. Even fresh from a beauty shop she looked rather—washed out? Don't you think?"

"Come, Imaginajohn," Mary said with a great dignity. "There is no reason we have to eat in the vicinity of such a cat. As for John—he's made his bed—OH," she stood up and marched indignantly to another table.

Imaginajohn smiled at Imagimary and shrugged his shoulders, then followed Mary.

"So she thinks I'm drab," John said, glaring after the departing Mary. "She can't stand to be in the same neighborhood in a public place, huh? Come on, Imagimary. We're going to sit at the same table, and she'd better like it or else."

"Wonderful," Imagimary said, laughing gleefully. She wound her fingers in John's hand as they followed Mary and Imaginajohn, and smiled ever so sweetly at Mary as she sat down opposite her.

Mary glared with a withering glare, but said nothing. Instead, she became overly engrossed in the menu.

A slow smile spread over John's face. He looked over at Imaginajohn gloatingly.

"Tell me, Imaginajohn," he said. "Coming out of the ether, so to speak, what do you use for money?"

Imaginajohn turned very red.

"I have the money," Mary came to his defense.

"Oh yes, of course," John said insultingly.

Imaginajohn looked thoughtful for a moment, then his face cleared.

"That will be remedied shortly," he said. "I'm applying for a position at your company, John. I'm sure they will soon recognize my—ah—superior points."

"I doubt it," John said. "I think you're in for some rude shocks, being the product of a woman's mind the way you are." He turned to the waiter with a satisfied gleam in his eye at the expression of dismay on Imaginajohn's handsome features.

His sense of triumph was short lived, however. He heard Imaginajohn say complacently:

"Well, since all this is on John, or at least being paid for with his money, I might as well eat hearty."

JOHN SCOWLED fiercely at his image in the mirror. His black eye looked a dirty purple. There even seemed to be a few gray hairs. Also he had a headache, but he was getting used to waking up in the morning with a headache.

But in back of his unpresentable morning appearance was something that had grown slowly. It was an air of determination. He had awakened this morning with a firm resolve. And a plan.

His expression softened at the sound of Imagimary singing outside the bathroom door. All this bickering that Mary was carrying on. Imagimary was taking it very gracefully. But of course she would. She was —wonderful.

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John washed his face in cold water to wake up, then hastily gave it the once over with his electric razor.

Imagimary was arranging the breakfast that had been brought up. She greeted him with an impudent little smile. He went over and kissed her, and sat down.

"Going to be busy all day again today?" Imagimary asked wistfully.

"Have to," John replied. "The way Mary and Imaginajohn are going through OUR money..." He let the thought hang there. But he had no intention of going to work today. He had made arrangements for a day off. He had other plans.

In a very similar hotel room on another floor Mary and Imaginajohn were eating a very similar breakfast. Even more remarkably similar, Imaginajohn also had a black eye, the result of a heated argument with John in a nightclub.

Mary's eyes were full of pity as she looked at the eye. In her heart had crystalized a bitter determination.

"I'm going out this morning, darling," she said to Imaginajohn. "I'll be back before lunchtime."

"Oh?" he said. "Going shopping? Maybe I'd better go along to carry the packages."

"No," Mary said. "This is something else. I won't be long."

"All right, darling," Imaginajohn gave in.

JOHN WAS humming briskly as he paid the taxi driver and crossed the sidewalk to the entrance to the building housing Horace's flat. He tried the door. It was locked, so he rang the bell.

He waited a few minutes, then tried again. Horace was undoubtedly asleep.

He backed off across the sidewalk to the curb and looked up at the second floor windows to see if there was a light on. There was.

He went to the door to ring again. Sounds of someone stumbling down the stairs inside could be heard. Seconds later the door opened. Horace stared out with bleary, faded eyes.

"Oh, hello, John," he said. "Or are you Imaginajohn?"

"I'm John, all right," John said. "Let me come up. I want to talk to you."

Horace backed up in the doorway to make room for John to pass him, then followed him up the creaking stairs.

Upstairs, John paced the floor impatiently while Horace fixed himself a morning cocktail with shaking hands.

"I want to borrow your exteroceptor deceptor until tomorrow," John blurted out as soon as Horace had gulped his drink down.

Horace blinked at him owlishly.

"Sorry," he said. "Not that I wouldn't be glad to loan it to you, ol' pal—if I had it."

"If you had it?" John echoed in dismay. "But if you don't have it, where is it?"

"Your wife woke me up and borrowed it about half an hour ago," Horace said calmly.

"My wife!" John groaned. "You shouldn't have let her have it. She's going to murder Imagimary with it!"

"Well," Horace said, smirking. "Wasn't that what you wanted it for yourself? To murder Imaginajohn with?"

"But that isn't mur—" John blurted, then stopped. "She may be back at the hotel already. I've got to get back there. Where's your phone. Call a taxi."

"Don't have a phone," Horace said. Then, louder, as John ran down the stairs. "Tell Mary to be careful of

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my exteroceptor deceptor."

But John was out of hearing, searching the street with wild eyes.

Horace went to the window and looked out. A figure moved out of the bedroom at his back and joined him in time to see John flag a cab and climb in.

"There he goes," Horace said vaguely.

"Yes, there he goes," Mary said. The exteroceptor deceptor hung in her limp hand.

"Sure you want to go through with it?" Horace asked. "He's right. It would be almost the same as murder. After all, Imagimary is real, you know. Just as real as you are."

"Yes," Mary said, sniffing. "It would be almost the same as murder, wouldn't it. I—I guess I'll just have to let her have John."

"Sure," Horace said. "That's the best way. And after all, you have a much better edition of John, Imaginajohn."

"I know," Mary wailed, crying now. "But he isn't John."

"You mean," Horace said. "You'd rather have John with his imperfections than Imaginajohn with his perfections?"

Mary nodded.

"Well." Horace patted her shoulder helplessly. "Maybe he'd rather have you, too. Otherwise, why would he want to murder Imaginajohn? He could just pack up and run off with Imagimary."

He gently took the exteroceptor out of her lax fingers and carried it over to the coffee table.

"Why don't you," he suggested, "go back to the hotel and the four of you talk things over? I think—well, I won't say what I think; but why don't you try it?"

"All right," Mary said, drying her tears.

"IMAGINAJOHN" Mary said timidly to the outstretched, relaxed figure on the bed. "I—I want to ask you something."

"What is it, Mary?" was the reply. "You don't look so happy this morning."

"I'm not," Mary said, her voice coming dangerously close to breaking. "Would you feel awfully hurt if I gave you up?"

"Why?" the figure said, sitting up suddenly.

"B-b-b-because I l-l-love John," Mary said. "I don't love you, even if I did dream you up. I j-j-just did it to make John jealous with his old dream girl, anyway."

The figure on the bed smiled, humor tugging at the corners of the mouth in soft jerks.

"But suppose John won't give up Imagimary?" he suggested. "Then you won't have anybody at all."

Mary sat down on the bed and let herself cry. She let the man on the bed cradle her head on his shoulder.

"I'll just go home and die if he won't give her up," she wailed.

His finger curled under her chin and lifted it gently.

"Look at me, Mary," he said.

She blinked back the tears and looked. Slowly wonder replaced her tears.

"You're John!" she said.

"That's right," he said.

"But—Imaginajohn?" she said blankly.

John reached into his pocket and extracted some papers. He unfolded them. They were two notes, identical in content. He handed them silently to Mary.

One began, "Dearest Mary," and the other "Dearest John." Then they read, "Please don't take this too hard. We love you, but we were really made for each other, not for you two. We are going to get married

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and go away so you will never see us again. We hope you will go back together, because although you don't seem to think so now, you really do love each other." Both notes were signed, "Imagimary and Imaginajohn."

"I found one in my room," John said. "So I went down to the desk and got the key to your room and came in and found the other one here. They're gone."

"But you," Mary said miserably. "You were in love with her. You'll miss her. I was already going to give my dream man up. But you—" she stopped helplessly.

He shook his head. "As soon as I read the note I realized it was true," he said. "After all, I dreamed up Imagimary because I was lonesome for YOU. I loved her because she was you. The minute you showed up here I would have ditched her if I could have figured out some way short of murdering her."

"Then you REALLY love only me?" Mary asked timidly.

"Of course, silly," John said, rumpling her hair.

Mary sighed happily and relaxed in his arms.

* * *

And in the blending of their hearts their desire for a dream companion dissolved. And in the mysterious workings of time and space the self perpetuating heterodyning effect that had preseved Imagimary and Imaginajohn weakened and broke, leaving a very bewildered license clerk with a marriage license held out to the thin air where two happy persons had been standing.

But the ways of Nature are strange and wonderful, for in that same instant Imagimary and Imaginajohn looked out from the eyes of their respective counterparts and knew that they still lived, as they had always, their physical beings having been merely the physical projection of their mental existence.

John and Mary, in giving up their dream mates, had in reality gained them again. But only Imagimary and Imaginajohn knew that.

THE END

BY THE NUMBERS!

★ **By Sandy Miller** ★

EVERY NOW and then you hear somebody make the remark, "oh, I'm no good at mathematics—I never can add or multiply." That remark is quite provoking for it shows that whatever the person is talking about, isn't his or her lack of mathematical knowledge—just general knowledge. For it is an assured fact that there is no relationship between a person's ability to calculate and his ability to do or understand mathematics. Calculation is a mechanical technique which requires no particular brains whatsoever. Many times, many of the so-called "calculating prodigies" had no mathematical ability at all. Similarly many skilled mathematicians today have little or no ability to do the required routine manipulation of symbols called calculation. This doesn't stop them from being mathematicians however—not one iota.

This is best shown by many people who say, "I never could get algebra in high school, but geometry was fun," or the other way around. Such statements are actually pictures of certain aspects of the persons' talents rather than anything else.

The proper way for an individual to determine this is to buy a good book on general mathematics, something which can show the fascination and fire of the subject, like "Mathematics and the Imagination", and set to work reading it. He'll soon see how fascinating the subject can be.

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ANCIENT EGYPT

★ By Walter Luthrop ★

ANCIENT Egypt has produced much of mystery, and remains a fertile field for the imaginative writer. Fantasy fiction can find no more romantic—and weird—subject than this land so filled with unusual ideas and practices. Recently this has been reaffirmed for there has appeared a new book called *The Egyptian*, by a Finnish author named Waltari. It has become a best-seller in the United States, after being an enormous success in Europe where it was translated from the Finnish into a half a dozen European languages.

It deserves this success. Anyone who has an interest in fantasy fiction should undertake to procure the book because it is an extraordinarily fascinating account of the ancient Egypt of two thousand years before Christ. It is a story which required a great deal of research and while it is not fantasy, the strangeness of the life then, makes one think it is. Ancient Egypt, Babylonia, Crete and all the other strange lands of the time are seen through the eyes of the hero, a wandering physician named Sinuhe, who travels from land to land observing shrewdly the customs of the countries.

One of the most fascinating parts of the book to the lover of the weird and fantastic is the story of the days Sinuhe spends in the Emblaming Chambers of the Dead, wherein one is told exactly how the Egyptians who so venerated the dead, prepared their bodies. The common Egyptian operation of trepanning, cutting a hole in the skull for those ill of mental diseases, is considered in detail. The many fascinating cults of various gods are discussed.

It is one of the most fascinating recent books to come to the attention of this reviewer. For anyone who would like to know something about the ancient world, before the days of the Jews and the Greeks, we can recommend without reservation this finely documented story. It will clarify in one's mind many of the confusing ideas we now have about those times. The whole vast panorama of this thinly civilized world is spread clearly before our eyes. Certainly Man has come a long way since then. No story of fantasy could be more absorbing than this strictly factual novel.

* * *

INVESTMENT CASTING

★ By Ramsey Sinclair ★

THE DISCOVERY of certain new alloys in concurrence with the development of the gas turbine and the jet engine, has led to the use of an age-old method of casting metals. The alloys are extremely tough and hard and heat-resistant. Therefore they must be cast as closely to the finished shapes as possible in order to minimize grinding and machining. The only highly accurate process in the foundry is the ancient "lost-wax" process, now called "investment casting".

This ingenious principle of founding metals has long been used. Jewelers and dentists have used the method for high-accuracy casting work. The ancients used the system in artwork. It is a highly effective and accurate method.

Unlike ordinary founding the patterns are not made of wood but of wax. These are then encased in a plaster of fireclay mold. The mold after setting is heated and the molten wax runs out leaving a perfectly formed mold into which the metal is poured. Usually the pouring is done under centrifugal force in order to drive the metal into every crack and crevice of the mold. The resulting casting is a perfect duplicate of the wax pattern.

This is of course a more costly method than simple sand casting but its accuracy by eliminating machine work makes up for it. Without the process jet engine manufacture would be much more difficult. Because the system is so easy many amateurs use it for casting novelties and jewelry. It is easy to carve a piece of wax into the most intricate of shapes laden with fine detail. Then it is simple too to prepare the mold. And the casting is a perfect replica. Thus the veriest tyro can do satisfactory founding of complex shapes.

For a long time this system of founding was regarded as a craftsman's secret by the ancients who gave it the name of the "lost wax" process. Of course there is nothing lost or secret about it. It was just regarded as a guild monopoly. But until recently it has always been used on a small scale. Now however it is an important part of modern technology and many new applications are found for it as time goes on. Wherever complicated shapes must be cast in refractory metals to a great accuracy, investment casting provides the answer.

* * *

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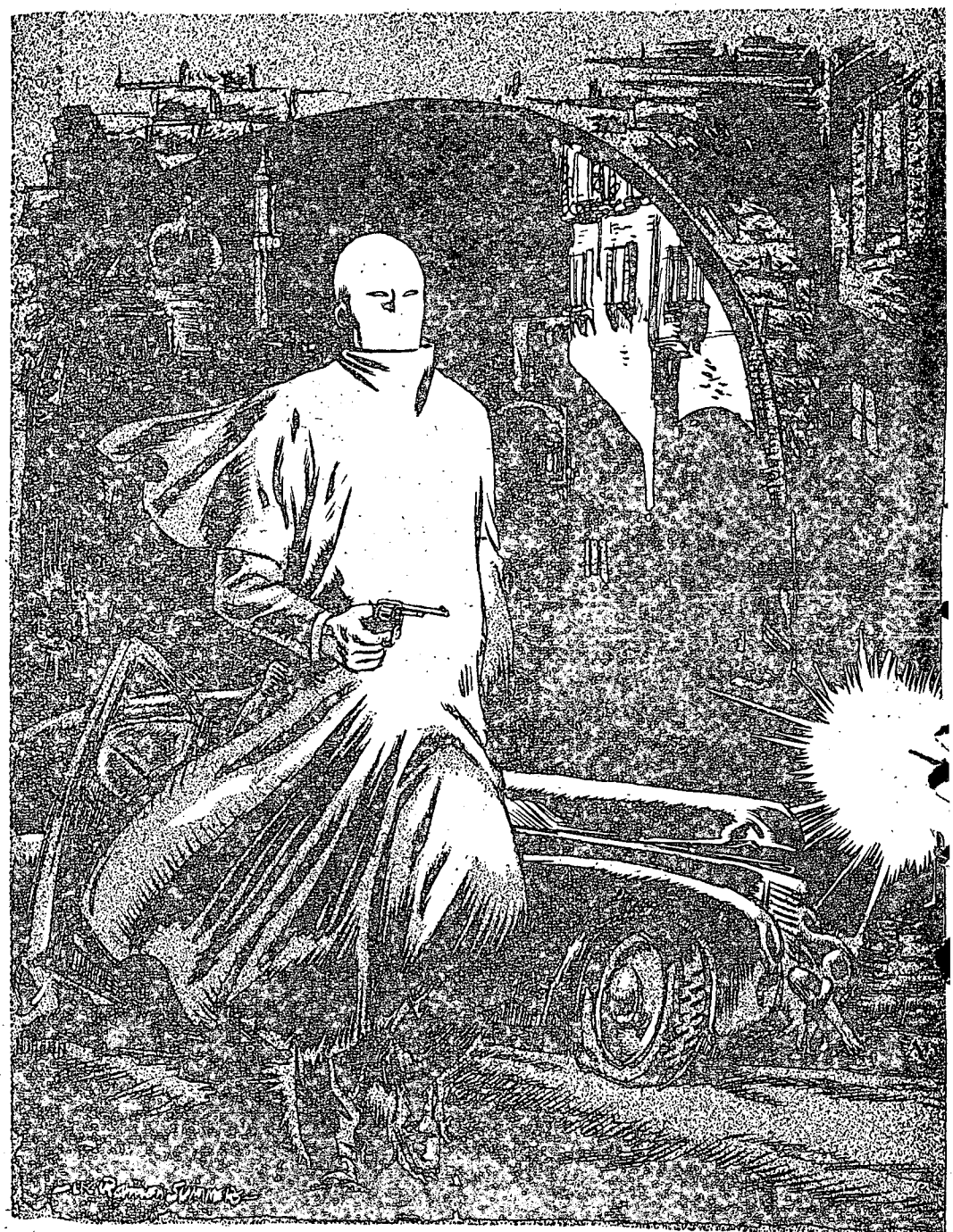
The GOLDEN MASK of



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AGHARTI

By John & Dorothy DeCourcy

The Man in the Golden Mask had been sent into the outer world for a reason. A great menace was sweeping toward Agharti!

THE TABLE satisfactorily accommodated the nine sharp featured men. They wore civilian clothes, but it was obvious that eight of them would have been more at home in a uniform. The ninth, however, looked as though he were very comfortable. His body was relaxed. His eyes were alert as they darted from face to face with a penetrating comprehension that the others in the room lacked. Everyone seemed to be waiting for this man to speak. When it became obvious that this man had no intention of opening the conversation, a large blond man

As he leaned from the window of his smashed car he saw a strange figure coming toward him. Then his gun exploded — but still the figure advanced

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with close cropped hair arose and cleared his throat, gratingly. His enunciation was a little too clear; his English a little too precise; his R's, a little too sharp.

"I trust you understand, Mr. Stanner, that we have not brought you here to play games." He paused and stared at Mr. Stanner.

Stanner smiled, revealing even, white teeth. "I think if I were in your position, General Von Brandt," he replied, "and didn't care to play games, that I would stop playing."

The General's face colored. "I repeat, Mr. Stanner, we brought you here for a purpose." He glanced about the room at his companions sitting ramrod stiff in their chairs. "My friends have decided that you are the man to do a small job for us. I can't say that I agree with their choice but since you are here, I will accept their judgment."

There were still traces of a grin on Leo Stanner's face when he answered. "Was there something wrong with my recommendation? Or don't you like my face?"

"I think I've made it clear, Stanner," the General barked, "that none of us are in the mood for your humor!"

"May I suggest then that you shut your braying yap, General, and we'll get down to cases!"

Whatever the General was going to say was lost in a loud report that rang from the concrete walls. For an instant, General Von Brandt remained on his feet, his mouth forming a little O of surprise. Then his heavy body struck the table with a crash. Slowly, he slid limply to the floor. None of the other men moved. Little highlights of fear in their eyes gave the reason.

LEO STANNER'S smile was broad now. "You see, gentlemen," he said softly, "The rumors are right. I AM the most cold blooded killer in the world."

No one answered Leo Stanner. They sat like images, perspiring images.

Leo laughed. "Come, come gentlemen. Don't tell me a little thing like murder upsets eight eminent ex-members of the Gestapo! Don't be afraid. I'm not going to kill you. I just wanted to make the vote unanimous."

A forced laugh ran around the table but still no one answered. A fly lit on the nose of the man across the table from Stanner. His eyes blinked but he didn't move. Finally, Stanner took his hand out of his pocket and laid his palms down on the table to match everyone else's.

"Now that General Von Brandt is no longer with us, who would like to be the chairman?" Leo waited a moment but no one seemed to relish the job. "I guess I'll have to appoint someone." He pointed to the man who had lately been the host to the fly.

"Me?" the man asked timidly. "Ah—very well." He cleared his throat as he stood up. "We—ah—got in touch with you and arranged this meeting for—ah—."

As the man hesitated, Leo grinned. "Go on."

"To put it briefly, we would like to have you perform a small service for us." Again the man hesitated.

"Don't be afraid," Leo prompted. "You want me to kill someone. Who is it?"

"The man's name is Ira Travers. Have you heard of him?"

Leo laughed. "I hear his name every other day! He's the most dangerous man in the world, outside of myself of course. But—ah—, there's

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one other little point. How much are you offering?"

"We——one hundred thousand dollars."

Leo shook his head, depreciatingly. "A quarter of a million," he said.

The spokesman glanced at his companions. One by one they nodded their heads.

"In advance," Leo added.

The German cleared his throat and drew a fat envelope from an attache case. Leo arose, picked up the envelope and quickly counted the bills.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he smiled. "It's a pleasure to do business with you." He turned and walked to the door. As he opened it, he turned to the men again and struck a dramatic pose. "Ira Travers will be dead in seven days! Goodnight, gentlemen." He closed the door softly behind him.

Leo Stanner walked up the steps from the basement. Before he reached the street, he patted his coat to make sure that the envelope didn't make too much of a bulge. He stepped into the street and walked quickly away. A few minutes later, seven men emerged from the same doorway, entered their cars, and vanished into the night.

IT ALL could have been a scene in Berlin except for one incongruous note. There was a sign on a nearby building which stated, "The Beer That Made Milwaukee Famous!"

Leo was whistling now. He seemed pleased. He stopped at a newsstand, picked up a copy of a popular magazine and hailed a cab. Settling back in the cushions, he idly thumbed through the magazine.

"I wonder what Steve has to say," he mused. He ran his eyes down the table of contents and quickly riffled the pages. Leo began reading a story when suddenly, he stiffened. "Ira Travers! What do you know!"

He skimmed through the rest of the story and then, apparently reaching a decision, opened the partition between he and the driver.

"I've changed my mind, driver. Take me to the airport instead."

As cab drivers are prone to do, he shrugged and made a U turn in the middle of the block. A few minutes later, they turned on to East Wisconsin Avenue and drew up to the airport. Leo paid the cab driver and hurried into the terminal. As the door swung inward, he heard the PA system announce, "Flight 34 leaving for Chicago! All passengers for flight 34!"

Leo grinned. "Made it!" he breathed. Leo purchased a ticket and rushed the reservation clerk in arranging for his seat. There was a slight delay but Leo managed to make it just in time. He had hardly gotten himself settled before the stewardess came up the aisle announcing, "Fasten your safety belts, please." Leo did as he was instructed and the engines on the Douglas burst into life.

He paid no further attention to the proceedings and devoted himself entirely to the magazine. He buried himself so thoroughly that he was unaware that the plane was in the air.

The stewardess leaned over and said: "We're in the air now, sir. You can unfasten your safety belt if you wish."

As Leo did so, he caught a glimpse of the stewardess' face. She was eyeing the magazine curiously. Leo reflected that it didn't exactly fit the type of character that he appeared to be. He smiled with a trace of mis-

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chief.

"I read Fantastic Adventures all the time," he confessed with candor. "You see, I'm the head of the research department for the Amalgamated Scientific Industries. I get all my good ideas from it."

The stewardess was all the way back to the rear of the cabin before she reacted. She turned and stared at Leo again but he went on reading, a bland smile on his countenance. While ostensibly reading his magazine, Leo surveyed his fellow passengers. His smile broadened and he half rose from his seat, leaned over the seat in front and dropped his magazine in the man's lap.

THE MAN jumped and turned. "What the hell—"

It was Von Brandt. "You!" he said hoarsely. "Ira!" He struggled for an instant but couldn't seem to find any words.

"The one, the only, the original!"

"But I thought—that is—, I was going to meet—you—in New York!"

"There's been a slight change in plans," Ira smiled, "but nothing to worry about. By the way, what name did you use for your reservation?"

"My own, Rog Philips. Why?"

"That's good," Ira replied. "You would have a perfectly valid reason for visiting Chicago. There isn't a chance of our being followed."

"What about the hopeful ex-Nazis?" Rog asked.

"They're going to have to go to work for a living so we needn't worry about them."

"Was that quarter of a million all they had?"

"They didn't know it, but it was," Ira admitted. "I had another colloid mask besides the one I'm wearing and it bore a remarkable resemblance to Ditzler, the treasurer. At least, the bank didn't hesitate about closing out their account."

"When did you do this?" Rog asked incredulously.

"About an hour after they made the withdrawal for the quarter of a million. I rather thought that would set the stage. All told, we have about one million, four hundred thousand dollars. I'm rather glad that Ditzler made it so easy to withdraw such large sums of money from his account."

Rog laughed. "You certainly charge high prices to kill yourself, Ira."

"Shhh, not so loud," Ira cautioned. "We don't want the passengers to know that they're riding with the notorious Ira Travers!"

Rog nodded his head. "What happens now?"

"We're going to San Francisco," Ira replied tranquilly.

"What about the money? You haven't got it all on you, have you?"

"Why of course. I had it all changed into dimes and put it right here in my pocket!"

"I'm serious, Ira," Rog protested.

"Well, if you'll sleep better knowing, I'll tell you. It's in your suitcase. I put it there this afternoon. All except the salary I just got, of course."

Rog looked worried. "But I checked my bag! I don't have it with me!"

"It's in the baggage compartment, isn't it?"

"Yes," Rog admitted dubiously. "But..."

"Well don't worry about it." Ira said. "And in the meantime I'm going to take a nap."

BREAKFAST IN Chicago was a painfully silent affair. Ira was wrapped in his own thoughts, while Rog kept nervously eyeing his hand-

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bag. A passerby would have assumed that it was filled with writhing cobras from the expression on Rog's face. The oppressive silence didn't add to his peace of mind, either. Ira had covered his eyes with the palm of one hand and seemed to be in some sort of trance.

Finally he looked up. "I've been deciding on our next move. I think the best thing to do is for you to go and see your boss. While you're there, you might borrow a razor and shave. You can do whatever you wish today. In fact, I think it would be a good idea if you behave as though nothing has happened. Go out and bowl, play poker and in general appear to be enjoying yourself."

"Do you think I can enjoy myself," Rog asked, "with over a million dollars sitting in my suitcase?"

"I'm coming to that," Ira smiled. "When you leave here, take a cab and run out to the airport. Make reservations for Mr. Gregory Smith and his secretary for tonight if possible. Then check your bag. As soon as we leave here, we'll stop in the men's washroom and take about five thousand dollars apiece for expenses. I have a bank account here but there is just a possibility that others may know of it so we'll play safe and use this money for traveling expenses.

"I'll go to the Hotel Morrison and register as Gregory Smith. I'll also have a room reserved for my secretary but you won't be my secretary as far as the hotel knows. I'll carry that little deception on, myself. You can phone me anytime you wish and that way I'll know what plane we are taking. While you're in town, pick up a good leather brief case or folder and get into the habit of carrying it under your arm. When we're in the washroom, you can take that corset of yours off. You don't need to look like a Prussian officer anymore."

Rog's fingers stole to his shirt front and felt the heavily boned affair. "Things have been so exciting the past few hours, I'd forgotten I had it on. Come to think of it, I can't breathe too easily."

Ira chuckled. "I forgot to compliment you on the way you carried it off. With those credentials, they didn't for a minute suspect that you weren't a blood thirsty Junker."

Rog smiled. "You really think I did a good job?"

"Well," Ira admitted, "mother nature helped you a little by giving you a square head to begin with."

Rog's lips set in a grim line again. "You've never done anything but insult me from the day I met you," he complained.

"If you'd stop fishing for compliments, maybe you'd get one once in a while," Ira pointed out. "But in all honesty, I must say you did a good job."

THE IRRITATION faded from Rog's normally placid brow. He grinned. "Would you like to have another cup of coffee?"

"I think we'd better forego the pleasure and get moving." Ira arose and walked toward the lobby of the hotel. Rog looked down at the table and picked up a scrap of paper.

"Again I get stuck with the check!" he grunted. He shrugged, picked up his bag and followed Ira.

By the time Rog reached the washroom, Ira had removed his coat and shirt and was repeatedly rinsing his face with steaming water. Finally, Ira straightened and began to peel the colloid mask from his skin. It always gave Rog a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach to watch Ira apparently peeling the skin off

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his face. In a moment, the mask was gone, and with it, the hard lines that had made up the face of Leo Stanner.

Rog surveyed himself in the mirror while Ira was combing his hair. Rog looked at his G. I. haircut ruefully.

"How do I explain this hair, Ira?"

Ira looked at him and grinned. "I guess you'd better say that you were troubled with body lice and had to have it cut off to get rid of them."

Rog snorted. "I can always count on you for a good explanation!"

"You've got about two hours before you have to make any explanations. Surely the agile mind of the great author, Rog Philips, can think of some explanation in that length of time."

Ira opened the grip and counted out two small stacks of bills. Just then, the door opened and a man started to enter the washroom. Hastily, Ira stepped in front of the bag.

"You no canna come in to da washroom. She—sa flood. The pipe she—sa bust. Wees got water all over da floor."

The man nodded his head comprehendingly and went out. A few moments later, as he and Rog prepared to leave, Ira smiled. "When you go out, Rog, try to look like an Italian plummer just in case our friend is still waiting in the lobby."

Rog glared at him and mumbled, "you and your bright ideas!"

The two men walked out of the lobby, Ira nonchalantly, and Rog, watching everyone as though they were preparing to close in. He didn't breathe easily until he was in a taxi, speeding away. Ira watched him move out of sight, and then, smiling, strolled down the street as though he didn't have a care in the world.

THE GREAT Douglas descended on the broad, concrete runway at San Francisco Municipal Airport. The tires touched, squealed briefly and then rapidly brought the great plane to a standstill in front of the administration building. Among the first to alight was the imposing Mr. Gregory Smith, followed by his tall, blond secretary. Rog was wearing a dilapidated blue suit and an equally battered gray hat which lent the impression that Gregory Smith paid his secretary poor wages indeed. Ira, although of average height, stood out from the other passengers by the elegance of his dress. He looked every inch the successful business man. Rog's attempts to appear as a secretary were ludicrous by their bumbling obviousness but no one seemed to notice him. Indeed, Rog would have had trouble attracting attention in a leopard skin next to the dashing Smith.

The ill-matched pair walked into the terminal and were on the point of leaving via the other door, when they were hailed.

"Hey, Smittey!"

Ira turned to see Steve Merrick approaching. There were lines of worry on Steve's face and dark circles under his eyes, but it was the same caustic Steve Merrick.

"I say, how's the dope racket these days!" Steve shouted so that every eye turned their way.

"Fine!" shouted Ira. "Are you doing all right with your white slavery?"

Steve was caught unprepared and in the pause that followed, a newsboy snickered. Steve's face turned crimson. He grasped Ira's arm. "Come on! Let's get out of this fire trap," he muttered.

Rog followed the two men out the door. They walked a short distance and stopped beside a light maroon

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Chrysler Highlander.

"Hmm," commented Ira. "I see you're the same old conservative Steve Merrick! It's odd though that you didn't have signs painted on the side, telling people who you are."

"Don't talk to me!" Steve growled. "The last time you opened your mouth, you got me in more trouble than I've ever been in. The only thing I want from you is, how do I get out of it?"

Ira chuckled. "It appears that my estimation of you was wrong. I thought the great Steve Merrick thrived on trouble."

"Well I don't!" Steve replied. He turned to Rog. "Who's this big boob!"

A pained look crossed Ira's face. "Tut, tut, Steve. That's no way to start a beautiful friendship. I thought you two would get along famously. This is Rog Philips. He's a writer too."

"Rog Philips, eh," Steve said hostily. "You're a hack writer aren't you?"

"Pulp writer," Rog corrected. "Are you Steve Merrick, the writer?"

Steve's chest expanded visably. "Yeah, ever seen any of my stuff?"

Rog became thoughtful. "I believe I saw one of your articles in the American Garbage Collectors Journal."

"Now, now boys," Ira interrupted. "Let's not have any bloodshed. We'll go up to Steve's place and relax. After I've had a cold bottle of stout, I'll tell you both what's wrong with your work."

"It's not my work that's bothering me! I've got something else waiting for you up in my studio," Steve said ominously.

"Don't tell us Steve. Save it as a surprise," Ira suggested.

STEVE said nothing. After crossing swords with Merrick, Rog took no further interest in the proceedings but sat looking out of the window, apparently absorbed in the scenery. After many hairbreadth escapes from death in traffic, the red convertible screamed to a stop in front of Steve's residence. They mounted the stairs to Steve's studio in silence. Steve rapped on the door in a complicated series of knocks. There was a pause, then a rattling of locks and the door opened a crack, a blue eye peering out at them. There was a grunt and the door closed. The safety chain rattled and then the door was flung wide.

A beefy man with a ruddy face admitted them. "Gee, I'm glad you're back Steve! Is this him?"

Steve nodded. "Ira this is Mike O'Rourke. Mike, this is Ira Travers. And this other fellow is Rog Philips." Steve smiled triumphantly. "I gather that you read Morton's Fork!" Ira nodded patiently. "In that case, if you'll step into the next room, I'll introduce you to our demon or dero, alias, Cyril Blakestone, III!"

"Dero?" Rog asked, his eyebrows trying to climb into his hairline. "You mean that story, Morton's Fork was true?"

Steve gave him a superior smile. "You don't think I write pulp fiction for a living do you?" Steve's tone conveyed the idea that pulp fiction writing fell in the same category as street cleaning or sewer maintenance.

Rog's lips compressed and he said nothing. Steve opened the bedroom door and the men filed in.

"Hmm," Ira said conversationally, "I see that you're getting a little careless, Steve."

Steve wheeled to see Ira pointing toward an open handcuff, the other

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end of which was firmly clamped to the bed.

Rog chuckled and observed to Ira, sotto voice, "Some of these crackpots really go the whole hog, don't they?"

"They sure do!" Ira agreed solemnly. "They'll probably both swear that there was someone in that handcuff."

Mike O'Rourke sighed. "But boss! He was in here not more than ten minutes ago!"

"Never mind, Mike," Steve answered. "These two farm boys wouldn't believe it even if he was still here!"

"I wonder," a cultured voice asked from behind the group, "if they would believe in this?"

They turned to view a smiling Cyril Blakestone, III—with a gun.

AS CYRIL stepped into the room, he was followed by five other men, their faces masked with scarfs. Efficiently, they disarmed Ira and O'Rourke. With equal efficiency they herded the four out of the room and down the stairs. Ira and Rog were loaded into Steve Merrick's car and the other prisoners into a large black Packard.

Swiftly, the two cars left San Francisco taking little used streets. The two men in the car with Ira and Rog maintained a profound silence. Rog tried a few questions but received no answers. Ira ignored the captors and chatted about current events and topics of general interest. After driving for nearly an hour, the two cars drew up to a small cottage on the sea shore. The four prisoners were hustled into the cottage, still without a word from any but Blakestone. Soon the men had securely tied the four to ordinary kitchen chairs. After this was done, the five masked men left the cottage. They heard the Packard's motor start and the big car raced away.

Blakestone had been watching the proceedings, half seated on a kitchen table. Finally, he laughed. "I didn't think you were as simple-minded as all this, Ira. You arose to the bait nicely."

"I sure did, didn't I," Ira agreed. "However, you should expect a trap knowing my reputation. But then, you don't think you can make a mistake, do you, Tobin?"

Steve looked at Ira curiously. Ira smiled and replied. "His name is George Dawson Tobin. He was a flunky in Dutch Schultz's racket. Now that he's on his own, he's trying to be a big shot and needless to say, he will be killed by the men he thinks are working with him."

Tobin chuckled. "That's not very likely, Ira, since I'm the only one outside of you, that knows the exact location of Agharti."

"Tobin, you're a liar!" Ira responded. "You're just hoping that I'll reveal its location to you. Don't you realize, you fool, that when those men find out that you don't know where Agharti is, they'll kill you without compunction?"

Little beads of perspiration appeared on Tobin's face. "All right! So I don't know where it is," he barked. "But you do and you're going to tell me."

"Am I?" Ira asked in a soft voice.

Tobin sat down again on the kitchen table. It was plain that he realized that Ira would never talk. He made a desperate attempt.

"Ira, why don't you throw in with us?" he asked. "You'd have a chance to make billions!"

"I've got enough money," Ira replied.

"You haven't got a cent!" Tobin sneered. "We've had drafts drawn on all your accounts. They've all

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cleared and if you don't believe me, look at this!" He drew forth a sheaf of papers, displaying them to Ira. "Even if you don't throw in with us," he continued, "you have got to have money or you can't even follow us let alone stop us."

Ira's face didn't change expression. Tobin went on. "Why don't you use your head, Ira! Just think of it! There are billions of dollars in Agharti, just for the taking. You can't fight us! We intercepted that telegram you sent to Merrick. In fact, we had every detail planned. We're just too strong for you! Can't you see? I stayed chained up in that hole of Merrick's for a month and a half just waiting for you to come back."

IRA SHOOK his head sadly. "You're the biggest fool I've ever met! When these men you're working with find out you don't know where Agharti is, they'll kill you and try to force the information out of me. You're just bait! Bait in a trap to catch Ira Travers!"

While Ira was talking, the door inched open and as Ira's last sentence died, it was punctuated by a shot. Tobin clutched his chest, fell to his knees, coughing, and died.

The five masked men silently reentered the room. One of them walked up to where Ira was tied. "Thank you very much, Mr. Travers," he said. "We suspected that Tobin was a fake but we are indebted to you for proving it."

Ira chuckled. "Glad to oblige, gentlemen."

"What's going on around here!" Steve exploded.

"Shall I tell him, Mr. Travers?" the masked man asked.

Ira smiled and nodded. The masked man drew up a chair and sat down. The others disappeared, carrying the body of Tobin.

The masked man cleared his throat. "Briefly, Mr. Merrick, you have been a pawn in a big game. Tobin was one of our pawns but you were one of Ira's." This didn't seem to set too well with Steve but he let it pass. "Originally, we planned to capture you and Travers. He was a little too quick for us, however, and left town before we could take action."

"Are you deros or demons or something?" Steve exploded again.

"I'm happy to say that we're not," the man answered. "We're just intelligent men who are trying to get along in the world."

"ARE there any deros?" Merrick snarled, "or is that just one of Travers' fairy tales?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know," replied the masked man. "That's beside the point." Merrick glared at Ira but said nothing. "We learned that this city Agharti exists and we discovered a method of overcoming its defenses. While we dislike murder and bloodshed, we are also interested in money. The city of Agharti contains valuable treasures. I couldn't even begin to estimate their worth. Travers knows of its existence and he would like to protect the city at all costs, so we decided to put Travers out of the way. Since he escaped our well laid plans two months ago, we have had to resort to a rather elaborate deception. Our late, lamented comrade, Mr. Tobin, remained a prisoner of yours while we sat back and waited for Mr. Travers to return."

"Very clever," Ira admitted. "But you still don't know where Agharti is!"

"That's true," the masked man admitted, "but you're going to tell us."

Ira merely smiled. The masked man turned to his comrades who had just returned. "Gag these others so that they can't interfere."

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It was quickly done and the leader nodded his satisfaction, opening a pocket knife. He slit Ira's coat sleeve open and a tiny frown of puzzlement formed on Ira's brow.

"You don't think you can torture it out of me do you?"

The man drew a gleaming metal case from his pocket. Opening it, he revealed a shining hypodermic syringe. "Not torture, Mr. Travers," he said. "Sodium pentothal!"

For the first time, Ira appeared disturbed. The man applied a tourniquet to Ira's arm and inserted the needle. He snapped the tourniquet off Ira's arm and began to press the plunger. In a matter of seconds, Ira's eyes clouded and his head dropped limply forward.

"What's your name," the man asked.

Ira's voice was toneless. "Ira Travers."

The four other men grouped closely around Ira's chair. One opened a stenographic notebook and wrote Ira's answers to the questions that were fired at him. The three other prisoners looked on helplessly. Rog strained at his bonds, shook his head violently, and relaxed, defeated.

THE MASKED men had been gone for nearly twenty minutes when Ira awoke. His eyes opened and then closed again. A few minutes passed while Ira gathered his strength. At last he was able to overcome the numbing effects of the drug. His head came upright and he blearily surveyed the room. He noted that Mike and Rog had maneuvered their chairs back to back and were frantically struggling with the knotted ropes. Ira took a deep breath, threw his weight forward on his chair and managed to balance himself and the chair on his toes. He hopped forward toward Mike and Rog. Twice he wavered unsteadily but at last he was almost touching the two men. Ira hung on his bonds, breathing heavily. When he had caught his breath, he straightened up.

"There's a razor blade in the heel of my right shoe," he said thickly. "When I turn myself over, you'll see a little piece of wire sticking out. The blade's attached to it."

Ira braced himself and with a light push of his toes, toppled over backwards. The chair struck the floor heavily and Ira relaxed while Rog and Mike began slithering toward him. Finally, Rog's fingertips were able to touch Ira's shoe. He felt around a moment and then gave a sharp pull. Ira smiled when he saw the blade hanging from Rog's fingers. Carefully, Rog and Mike moved back to back again and in a moment, Mike was free. Ten minutes later, the four men stood around massaging their wrists.

"I suppose I spilled the beans all over the floor," Ira said.

Rog nodded glumly.

"Not to change the subject or anything like that," Steve began sarcastically, "but why didn't they kill us?"

Ira smiled wanly. "They didn't have to. We don't know who they are and they've got all my money. They know that none of you have that kind of financing, so they merely saved themselves that trouble of digging four more graves."

"Yes, but you'll get money sooner or later won't you?" Rog asked.

"By the time I do, they will have done what they set out to do. Agharti will be looted and in ruins!"

"Why all the talk about money?" Steve asked. "What's money got to do with it?"

"You've played poker, haven't you Steve?" Ira asked. "Well, this operates on the same principle. It takes big money to get into this game and

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even bigger money to win."

"How much would you need?" Rog asked.

"At least a million dollars," Ira replied casually.

Mike whistled softly. "A million bucks!"

"Hey, what about the money in the suitcase?" Rog asked.

"You mean, I didn't tell them about it?" Ira was surprised and instantly alert.

"No," Rog grinned. "They didn't ask about it. They found the plane check in my pocket when they searched me but they put it back again. See!" Rog held the bit of white cardboard in the air.

"What about pocket money?" Ira asked. "Do any of you have any?"

Everyone shook his head except Mike O'Rourke. "They cleaned out my billfold," he replied, "but my grandmother always told me to keep a little in reserve." He drew a large turnip watch out of his pocket and snapped the cover open. Carefully, he removed a picture of a whitehaired woman and from behind it, a twenty dollar bill.

"Do you think we can stop them, Ira?" Rog asked.

"We've got a chance anyway," Ira replied. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

THEY left the cottage and started walking briskly down the highway. Soon a car came into view going their way and Ira stepped onto the highway, waving frantically. The car slowed and stopped. A woman rolled a window down.

"Hello Rog," she called. "What are you doing out here?"

Ira quickly stepped into the breach. "Our car ran off the road about a mile back."

Rog nodded his head and grinned. "Well, climb in and we'll give you a lift into town," a man's voice called from within the car.

The four entered and there was silence as the car picked up speed.

The driver glanced at Ira. "Was your car equipped with a pocket knife?"

"What do you mean?" Ira asked.

"I mean, it must have been a very educated automobile," the driver replied. "It slit open your sleeve, gave you an intravenous injection and then put a piece of adhesive over it."

Rog chuckled. "Ira, this is Dorothy and John de Courcy. They like to deduce things."

Steve Merrick snorted. "More hack writers!"

Suddenly Mike looked at Rog. "You mean, you're THE Rog Philips? And these are THE Dorothy and John de Courcy?"

Steve Merrick looked pained. "Yes, and I'm THE Steve Merrick! Quit rubbernecking at these cent-a-word hacks!"

"So you're Steve Merrick, huh," John said. "You sound like you're letters. By the way, that story you sent us was published this month."

"Under your by-line, I notice," Steve snarled

"Then you must be Mike O'Rourke," Dorothy smiled looking at the big Irishman.

"That I am, mam, and pleased to meet you, I am."

"Well, now that the social amenities have been observed," Steve began, "suppose you step on the gas. I want to go home and get some sleep!"

John ignored him and turned to Ira. "I assume you're the famous Ira Travers."

"Unless you watch where you're going," Ira responded, "it will be the late Ira Travers."

The car swerved and regained the road.

"By the way, what time is it," Ira

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asked.

John glanced at his watch. "Five-thirty-two," he replied. "Where do you guys want to go?"

"I want to go home!" Steve barked.

"You can drop us where ever you happen to be going in town," Ira said politely.

"Oh we're not going anywhere," John replied. "Dorothy just had one of her feelings this afternoon. Her intuition told her we should go for a drive down the coast, so we did."

"Not another premonition!" Rog groaned.

"You would have had a long walk if she hadn't had it," John reminded him.

Dorothy turned on her charm. "By the way, what's going on?"

Rog grinned and said nothing.

"It's about ten miles into town," John observed in a loud voice, "and unless we get a chance to put this into a story, you've got a ten mile walk."

The car began to slow down.

"All right, you blackmailers," Rog agreed. "When I get back to Seattle, I'll give you the whole story, but you've got to do something for me."

"What?" Dorothy asked suspiciously.

"You've got to keep up my correspondence."

"Oh! You want me to become a forger!" Dorothy sneered.

"No. I've got at least twenty sheets of paper all signed in my file. That ought to last you for a while."

Dorothy looked at John. A malicious grin spread over his face. "It's a deal!" they said.

Rog silently handed over the keys to his house.

"I'd like to add one more condition, if I may," Ira broke in.

"Shoot," John said.

"Can you drop Rog and me off at the airport?"

Steve growled but said nothing.

"Hold on to your hats," John yelled, "we're off!"

"You can say that again," Steve muttered.

A dead silence asserted itself as the speedometer climbed over the eighty mark. Mike O'Rourke cleared his throat nervously at ninety. The Irishman's eyes were glued on the instrument and as it touched one hundred, he quietly fainted. Rog stuck a burning match in his mouth and threw an unlighted cigarette out of the window. Steve Merrick began to snore and Ira was nonchalantly polishing his fingernails on his untorn sleeve.

"This speedometer is different from the one on your car, Rog," John explained. "It reads about ten miles an hour slow."

Rog made funny gulping noises but didn't reply.

ROG AND Ira stood in front of the airport. The de Courcys waved them a cheery good-bye and their blue Cadillac made a screaming U-turn in the middle of the block. Two taxi cabs ran over the curb avoiding them but they made it out of sight. Rog and Ira stood for a moment listening. When the expected crash didn't materialize, they turned and went into the airport.

"Do you think they'll make it?" Ira asked.

"The chances are all against it," Rog said smiling, "but they've been getting by for years. You see, they have a theory that they have a guardian angel and they're testing the theory to see if it's right."

Ira shrugged. "Maybe they have. I have one so I know it's possible."

Rog snorted. "Another nut!"

The two men strolled over to the baggage counter. A moment later they had the suitcase. Trying to look

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composed, Rog followed Ira into the washroom. Once inside, Ira quickly snapped the case open, withdrew a bill and closed it. They walked out of the washroom and over to the ticket window. Ira purchased two tickets to New York and made reservations for the next morning. They left the air terminal and hailed a cab. As the cab sped across town, Ira outlined their immediate plans.

"You take these tickets, Rog, and give them to the USO. Tell them they're for any ex-GI who is going to New York."

Rog looked puzzled.

"The idea," Ira continued, "is to leave a false trail for someone to follow."

"What about you?" Rog asked.

"I'll get rooms for us at the St. Francis."

"What then?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get to the hotel. I'll register as Julius Kranz and secertary."

"I'm a secretary again!" Rog groaned.

"Never mind your social standing. At the next corner, hop out."

Rog shrugged and Ira directed the driver to stop. As the cab gathered speed again, Ira said, "take me to the Presidio."

While the cab rolled along in the gathering twilight, Ira formulated his plans. Finally, he straightened in his seat with a slight smile. When they reached the Presidio, they stopped at the gate while the MP on duty had a brief, whispered conversation with Ira. Then the MP closed the door of the cab and saluted. Ira gave the driver directions and they wound their way into the Presidio. Presently, they stopped in front of a small building and a small dapper man in a Major's uniform opened the door of the cab for Ira.

"Glad to see you again, General," he said cordially. "The gate phoned that you were coming."

IRA PAID the cab driver and they hurried up the steps. Inside the building, they walked into an office without knocking and a grizzled Colonel looked up in surprise and then smiled.

"Why General Stern! I haven't seen you for a long time. Come in and sit down."

"Thank you," Ira replied. "I'm sorry it's been so long Colonel, but I've been pretty busy. As a matter of fact, even this visit has a string attached to it."

"Anything you want," the Colonel replied.

"I need an office for about half an hour," Ira said, "and I have a lot of communications that must be pushed right through."

"Is this restricted?" The colonel asked.

"They will all have to be marked, 'secret'."

"In that case, take my office," the Colonel offered. "I was getting ready to leave anyway." The Colonel turned to the Major. "Spread the word around that General Stern is using my office and is not to be disturbed."

The Major nodded and left. The Colonel dialed a number on one of the telephones. There was a pause and then the Colonel said, "Major Scott? This Colonel Lieberman. General Archibald Stern of G-2 is using my office. All of his communications are top priority, secret. I'd like you to give him your full cooperation." Pause. "That's fine, Major. Goodbye."

The Colonel stood up and extended his hand. "When you get through, why don't you drop over to my house? Elizabeth and I have been hoping you'd come to dinner again."

"I will if I'm able," Ira promised.

"Fine," the Colonel answered en-

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thusiastically. He picked up his hat and turned to go. "If you need any help, don't hesitate to call me."

"Thank you," Ira replied, shaking hands.

The Colonel closed the door and Ira sat down, fingering the torn edge of his coat sleeve. Smiling, he reflected that he must look like a G-2 man. A few bullet holes would have made the effect perfect. Still smiling, he lifted the telephone. A crisp voice answered immediately.

"This is Lieutenant Smith of Security, sir. We're handling your communications at the Colonel's request."

"Get me the Secretary of War," Ira ordered crisply.

"Yes, sir," came the slightly awed reply.

Ira picked up another phone. "Lieutenant Bartling, sir of Security."

"I'd like the St. Francis hotel," Ira said. He sat back holding both phones to his ears. "The army's getting more efficient every day," he mused.

ROG SAT in the lobby of the St. Francis nervously chewing a toothpick. Frequently, he would gaze at the clock and each time he looked, the worried frown on his face deepened. He heaved a long sigh when he saw Ira come through the door. He trotted over to intercept Ira before he reached the desk.

"Something's wrong," Rog muttered out of the corner of his mouth.

Ira raised an eyebrow.

"Some general named Stumb, or something like that, arranged rooms for us!"

His name is General Stern and what's wrong with that?"

"You know him?" Rog asked.

"Know him," Ira replied, "I AM General Stern!" Ira turned, leaving Rog with his jaw hanging at half mast.

"I'm Julius Kranz," Ira explained. "I believe General Stern has arranged reservations for myself and my secretary, Mr. Fudge."

"Oh yes, Mr. Kranz," the clerk replied. The clerk signalled a bellboy and a moment later, Rog and Ira were led into the elevator.

"What's this all about?" Rog whispered.

"Later!" Ira cautioned.

The bellboy truimphantly led the procession out of the elevator and after Ira had sufficiently bribed him, Rog and Ira were finally alone.

"Now, maybe you'll do me the honor of explaining what in the hell I'm getting into!"

"Did you read that story of Steve Merrick's? The one that the de Courcys published?"

"You mean Morton's Fork?" Rog asked. "No! I only read my own stories!"

"Well, I'll try to put it in a nutshell then," Ira said patiently. "A couple of months ago, I looked up Steve and told him about Agharti. I knew he wouldn't believe me but I figured he would spread it all over some magazine. He did exactly that but not exactly the way I had planned. At the time, I was trying to smoke out this group of men who are trying to pillage Agharti. They took action before Merrick even wrote the story so I could tell at once that I had underestimated them. We returned to California but it seems they were a little too quick for me here too. If it hadn't been for that money we picked up in Milwaukee, we would be helpless."

"Now that you mention it," Rog broke in, "what were those broken down Nazi trying to do?"

"They are planning to reinstate the old Junkers regime again. The only serious obstacle to their plans is Ira

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Travers, so their first task is to have me eliminated. As long as they had to pay somebody to do the job, I decided that it might as well be me. I need an accomplice to help me carry it out, so I picked on you."

"I still don't understand!" Rog exploded. "How were you an obstacle to these Nazis and what's this General business?"

"If you would read your competitor's stories, you'd know! During the war, I was a member of the U. S. Army Intelligence and I was a Brigadier General."

"Does that make you an obstacle?" Rog asked.

IRA NODDED. "My last assignment was to break up the German underground, which I did. I'm a big stumbling block to them because I know them all by sight. I know all about them, their friends, families, even their favorite haunts. I know more about them than they do about themselves. If they were to start anything, the Army would merely have to call me back and I could pick them all up, but I called the Secretary of War and I imagine that they're in the hands of the immigration authorities by now."

"You called the Secretary of War?" Rog gasped.

"Yes," Ira said. "I had to arrange for transportation."

"Huh?"

"At six tomorrow morning, we're leaving San Francisco on an Army B-29. We're going to fly across the Pacific and engage in a little game of poker with our five masked pals."

"Well, just what are these guys going to do?" Rog asked.

"Frankly, I'm not sure," Ira answered, "but I know that one of them is a food chemist and I think he has developed a new poison gas which they plan to use in wiping out all the inhabitants of Agharti."

"Why do they want to do that?"

"Agharti is probably the richest spot on the face of the earth, not only in actual treasures but also in machines of such advanced design that I am unable to grasp the principles of more than a few."

"Then you've been to Agharti?" Rog asked incredulously.

"I lived there for two years. To be quite candid, I'm an agent for the King of the World."

"I've heard about this King of the World," Rog said. "What is he?"

"What he does is more important than what he is," Ira replied. "He's very old and throughout most of his life, he has been trying to prevent the race of man from committing suicide. He interferes only when necessary and then, only to stop a disaster that might result in the end of mankind."

"Well, can't he defend himself against these guys?"

"We don't know who they are or where or when they will strike. Probably they will be defeated but we can't take the chance. It's up to me, Rog, to see that they are stopped!"

"I'm in this too, Ira. How do we begin?"

"I have only one clue," Ira said thoughtfully, "and that may prove a false lead. While we were riding in Steve's car, I took the liberty of picking the driver's pocket. I didn't find anything of interest except a newspaper clipping marked, Rangoon, Burma, March 15. It said nothing in particular. A mysterious plane had been sighted by native inhabitants about ten miles north of Rangoon. It was identified from its description as an army P-51 but natives insisted that it had no markings and it was painted black."

"Was that plane from Agharti?" Rog asked.

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"Certainly not!" Ira chuckled. "They would no more think of using a P-51 for travel than you would a pogo stick."

Rog's eyes lifted in surprise. "Will I ever get a chance to see this fabulous city?"

"If you're a good little boy and go right to sleep tonight, you will—if you live."

ROG AWOKE to the insistent ringing of the telephone. Dumbly, he picked up the instrument. "Hello."

"It's five-thirty, Mr. Fudge."

"Wrong number," Rog growled, banging the phone down irritably. An instant later, he bolted upright. He threw the covers off and dashed toward Ira's adjoining room, his nightshirt flapping behind him. He stopped abruptly when he saw Ira's bed empty. He glanced into the bathroom but it was empty too.

"I wonder if he's run out on me," Rog mumbled to himself.

He shrugged his shoulders and went back to his own room. Throwing off his nightshirt, he hastily wriggled into his long, woolen underwear. Just as he was buttoning the last button, Ira opened the door.

"Well, well, sleeping beauty is up I see," he smiled. Ira studied the underwear for a moment and then shuddered. "Don't you think you're playing the part of Mr. Fudge, the secretary a little too thoroughly?"

Rog shook his head. "I couldn't find any shorts. This was the next best thing so I took them."

Ira looked at the bed. "Don't tell me you couldn't find any pajamas either!"

Rog bridled. "If I had any privacy, it wouldn't matter what I wore! By the way, that's a new suit isn't it?"

Ira nodded. He was neatly dressed in a light gray flannel suit. Rog painstakingly donned his shiny blue serge. Slowly, he tied his tie. At last he was replete in his usual sartorial splendor. Under Ira's persistent goading, they managed to leave the hotel at six o'clock. An army staff car was waiting at the curb. Ira guided Rog into the car and they rode away.

"What about breakfast?" Rog asked as they settled back in the cushions.

"We'll have breakfast on the plane," Ira smiled. "I personally will fix it."

"Oh fine!" Rog groaned. He peered out of a window. "Do you think we'll be able to see where we're going?"

"Don't worry about the fog. It's a common thing here. Besides, the pilot knows where we're going."

"Say, where did you find that suit at five in the morning?" Rog asked.

"It took a little doing," Ira admitted, "but I got it. Now that we're on the subject of suits, why don't you take some of your wealth out of the mattress and buy yourself one?"

"What's wrong with this one?"

"Nothing that a new suit wouldn't fix," Ira replied. "Just think! If you were dressed up occasionally, you wouldn't always be playing the part of my secretary."

"I'm not so sure I'd want to take your place," Rog smiled.

"Why not?" Ira asked. "You'd make more money than you do grinding out low grade fiction."

"I think my stories are pretty good."

"I'm glad someone does," Ira replied gently.

"Well, the editor buys them!" Rog insisted.

"Which just proves that you're lucky."

"I don't get you."

"You're lucky that I'm not the editor," Ira smiled.

"At least, I'm not on the 'wanted' circulars all over the world!"

"It's only a question of time before

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you lose that advantage."

"What have you got up your sleeve now?" Rog demanded.

"Nothing too bad," Ira laughed, "but we'll probably commit every known crime before we get back."

"I'm not so sure I want to get mixed up in this," Rog said dubiously.

"Why not? You're already an embezzler," Ira pointed out. "Besides, you'll probably have quite a pocket full of change when we get back, assuming for argument's sake that we do get back."

"I wish you wouldn't keep saying that!"

"Why not? The chances are all against us," Ira laughed.

Whatever Rog was going to say was lost as the staff car came to a stop. Rog looked out of the window at the gigantic B-29. He gulped and followed Ira out the door.

As they walked toward the plane, Ira said, "I bet you're wondering why you ever got into this, and wish you were home."

"You're a mind reader!" Rog replied, mopping his brow.

"Well, it's too late for regrets," Ira smiled. "Climb aboard and we'll have breakfast ala Travers in twenty minutes."

"I don't think I'm hungry," Rog replied.

"You will be before you reach Rangoon," Ira said, "if we reach Rangoon."

ROG STIRRED the mess on his plate disgustedly. "Am I supposed to eat this 'worms' and 'gravy'?"

"Sure," Ira said, digging into his own. "You can practically flick the vitamins off."

Rog glanced around the room. It was obviously the dining room of a decidedly third-rate hotel. "Is this the best hotel in Rangoon?" Rog complained. "Why I've stayed in better rat holes than this!"

"You're just self-conscious," Ira chuckled. "There's a better hotel. In fact, it's quite good but I'd rather not be seen."

"Couldn't we just sneak in there for one meal?" Rog suggested.

Ira shook his head. "There's no point in getting shot just to enjoy an English meal. Besides, the coffee isn't any good."

"Ah nuts!" Rog groaned. "Even I can cook better than this!"

"Shh," Ira grinned. "You don't want to hurt the chef's feelings!"

"You go to hell!"

"I think you're just suffering from too much thinking."

"Well, who wouldn't!" Rog exploded. "Weve been sitting in this pest hole called Ragoon, in a hotel I wouldn't recommend to my worst enemy for two days. We haven't gone outside once and I'm not so sure I even want to *go* outside!"

"Think of all the material you're going to get for stories," Ira suggested lightly.

"I'd rather not! I've already given most of the material away."

"You could still write an article for National Geographic."

"If I live to write an article!"

"Why, you're turning into a pessimist, Rog."

"Oh well, let it go," Rog sighed. "I thought we were going to do something when we got here!"

"We are," Ira answered, "just as soon as I get that telephone call."

At just that moment, the waiter came to the table. "There ees a call for Meester Goldsmith," he smiled.

Ira nodded, arose and walked toward the lobby. Rog looked back at his plate, stirred the ugly stuff once more, then got up and followed Ira.

Ira took the telephone from the

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clerk's hands and spoke crisply. "This is Goldsmith speaking." There was a long pause while Ira listened, smiling. "Thank you very much," he said and hung up. Turning to Rog he grinned. "Get your coat, Mr. Studge! We're going out for a while."

"Do I need a coat in weather like this?"

"Suit yourself," Ira shrugged, and led the way out into the street. They walked for some distance through the narrow, evil-smelling streets and finally turned into a smoke-filled hog-pen that passed for a restaurant. The window advertised American meals. They picked a table and sat down.

Shortly, a waiter in a greasy apron strolled over.

"We'll have two bottles of Bollinder's stout," Ira said.

The waiter looked at him expressionlessly. "Warm or cold, sir," he asked in surprisingly good English.

"Very hot," Ira replied, softly.

WITHOUT A word, the waiter turned from the table. Ira got up and motioned Rog to follow. They walked into the kitchen of the small restaurant and suddenly, Rog felt the urge not to breathe. He also felt the urge not to look, so instead he kept his eyes glued on Ira's back. In so doing, he stumbled over the carcass of a pig, not too freshly slaughtered.

The waiter pulled a greasy curtain aside and Ira, without hesitation, began to descend a flight of dingy steps. At the bottom of the stairs was a small door on which Ira knocked slowly four times. A bolt rattled and the door swung open. The dank room was well lighted by a gasoline lantern. Rog stepped inside, bending his head to avoid the low door frame. The occupant of the room was a negro who stood nearly seven feet tall. His features were unusual, his lips being fine and his nose, aquiline. He was dressed in a robe of blue silk which came to his knees as it was gathered about the middle with a golden belt which had tiny jewels set around its circumference. His feet were in sandles of some type of black leather and likewise were studded with small jewels.

The man smiled at Ira and spoke to him in rapid fire French to which Ira replied with equal fluency. Then the giant turned to Rog. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Philips," he said in a cultured voice. "We knew you were coming but due to unfortunate circumstances, we are unable to welcome you in more suitable surroundings. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Vana Shanu, Chief Counselor to the King of the World."

Rog gulped. "Er—how do you do. I mean, pleased to meet you!"

"The pleasure is entirely mine," Shanu replied with a smile. His teeth, Rog noticed, were very white and even, and as Rog shook hands with him, he realized that Vana was not a weakling.

"Do you have any information, Vana?" Ira asked.

"I'm afraid not, Ira. Your message was the first inkling that we have had of any plot."

"Well, that puts us right back where we started, doesn't it," Ira said thoughtfully.

"Not exactly," Rog put in. "We're still in Rangoon."

The other men laughed. Ira became thoughtful and said, "the only lead we have is that newspaper clipping about the plane."

Vana looked surprised. "What's this about?"

Ira explained about finding the clipping.

"That's very interesting," Vana replied, slowly, "because we also saw this plane or one like it. It flew almost directly over our city and quite naturally, our curiosity was aroused.

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We traced it down but were unable to find its owner. We do know that it is kept on a small farm a few miles north of here. It's quite obvious that the farmer has been paid for the use of his property."

"At least that's something," Ira said. "They'll probably come back for that plane sooner or later. I'm sure this plane is connected with them in some way."

"What makes you so sure?" Rog asked.

"I don't know," Ira admitted. "It's just a feeling I have."

"Oh no!" Rog groaned. "Not you too!"

Ira smiled. "Besides, why should that man carry a newspaper clipping?"

"I don't know," Rog answered, "but I would think that knowing you as well as they do, they would expect you to pick his pocket."

Ira scratched his chin thoughtfully. "By George, you might be right! They might expect us to watch the plane so that we wouldn't notice something else. But what?"

Vana adjusted the belt on his tunic. "There is nothing unusual in Rangoon with the possible exception of a religious fanatic who came to town this morning."

"This sounds interesting. What's he like?" Ira asked.

"He seems to be quite authentic. He preaches a modified Jainism or policy of peaceful living. He wears a yellow robe that touches the ground and has a mask over his face which is apparently made of gold or covered with gold leaf."

"Is he just preaching to the native inhabitants?"

"No," Vana shook his head. "He's attracting quite a few of the foreign residents mainly because of his bizarre appearance. He began this morning, speaking on the waterfront and some of the fishermen followed him as he came through town. Surprisingly enough, he spoke in German and in a few minutes repeated the same thing in French and then in English. Strangest of all, the manager of one of the hotels was quite taken with him and offered him a room free of charge. Several have gone up to see him and he has given them quite accurate character analyses. He refuses to accept any money and I rather think he is merely passing through and will be gone in a few days."

Ira shook his head, smiling. "No, he isn't just passing through. He's waiting to have an interview with Ira Travers."

IRA AND Rog crouched on the fire escape. The more Rog looked at the fire escape and the three stories of space beneath, the less he liked his position.

"Why don't we go in?" Rog whispered.

"I don't know what room he's in," Ira replied.

"How can we find out?"

Ira pointed through the window. "We can see the elevator from here," Ira explained. "It's one of those open cage affairs so we can see who is in it."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Vana is sending a message. Its addressed to the man in the golden mask and it should arrive about now. When you see a bellboy with a message, duck inside. I think we can race the elevator and win."

Rog nodded his head. They waited for another few minutes and then suddenly, Ira flicked the window open. By the time Rog had followed him over the sill, Ira was running up the stairs. When Rog caught up with him, he was standing at the edge of the fifth floor landing. Ira motioned him back out of sight. Rog could see

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the bellboy leaving one door and going to another. They heard nothing but the bellboy, hurrying back to the elevator. They waited until the hall was deserted before going on.

"What did he do?" Rog whispered.

"He had two messages. Apparently he was told to slide them under the doors."

"Which one do we try first?" Rog asked.

Ira shrugged and walked toward the nearest. They approached the door and paused. Cautiously, Ira turned the knob and the door gave. Both men entered the room quietly and closed the door softly behind. There seemed to be no one in the room and Rog looked at the floor. The message wasn't there. Suddenly, a woman emerged from the bathroom and hastily clutched a thin, silk robe around her body when she saw them. Rog felt as though he was going to drop through the floor but Ira was as calm as ever.

"I'm the house detective, mam. Sorry we busted in on you like this but somebody said they heard a scream. I knocked but you didn't answer."

The woman smiled at Ira. "I'm sorry it was a business call but I'm afraid I didn't scream." Her eyelids lowered slightly. "Maybe after you're through looking around, you might drop back?"

For once, Ira's tranquility was shattered. "I—, yes, I'll do that," he muttered. He gave Rog a nudge and opened the door. "I'm sorry we troubled you," he continued.

The woman smiled again. "No trouble at all, handsome."

Ira heaved a long sigh when they were out in the hall again.

"You don't seem to be much of a ladies' man," Rog observed.

"Oh shut up!" Ira growled. "Let's try the other one."

"How do you know he isn't on one of the lower floors?"

"These rooms up here are cheaper," Ira replied. "You don't think the management would give away a good room, do you?"

WHEN THEY reached the other door, Ira turned the knob. The door bumped against something when it was half open so he and Rog squeezed through. They stood for a moment, speechless. Behind the door a man hung on the wall, crucified by three, crudely made knives. Neither Rog nor Ira breathed. Finally, Ira exhaled sharply.

"I guess Tomely did want an interview with Ira Travers."

"Do you know this poor devil?" Rog whispered.

Ira nodded. "This was the man in the golden mask."

"Huh?" Rog grunted.

"Yes," Ira sighed. "This was Chester Tomely. He was an agent for the British Government."

Rog shook his head. "I don't get any of this."

"I suppose you should have an explanation but this isn't the time or place." Ira examined the dead man's clothing. "Suppose you look around the room and see if you can find that mask and the yellow robe."

Rog did as he was told but glanced back occasionally, studying Ira and the body of Tomely. Tomely had been a young man with sandy hair and a thin face. He was dressed in a torn white shirt and a pair of trousers. Rog shuddered and went back to ransacking drawers and closets. When he finished, Ira was standing thoughtfully, a bit of soggy paper in his hands.

"There isn't anything here, Ira," Rog said.

"I didn't think there would be," Ira replied without looking up.

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Rog glanced over Ira's shoulder and saw a message, crudely scrawled. It read, "6 writes."

"Where did you get that?" Rog asked.

"Tomely had time to slip this in his mouth before they went to work on him."

"Why was he killed?"

"Obviously, because he knew something."

"Well, how was he killed?"

"He was fed the bamboo pill," Ira said.

"What?"

"It's a particularly gruesome way to die," Ira explained. "A tiny sliver of a special type of bamboo is coiled up and coated with rice starch. When it is swallowed, the starch dissolves and the bamboo uncoils. In uncoiling, it perforates the internal organs."

Rog shivered. "Is this the same outfit that captured us in San Francisco?"

"Yes," Ira replied, "but let's not stand around here talking. We'd have a lot of explaining to do if we were caught here."

Carefully, the two men left the room and made their way down the stairs. Twice they had to dodge suddenly to keep out of sight but they finally made the window. They stepped onto the fire escape again and Ira closed the window.

"Where do we go from here?" Rog whispered.

"Nowhere," Ira said. "Well just sit and wait for a while."

The minutes crawled slowly by. Soon Rog thought everyone in town must know they were on the fire escape. He shifted his position several times, sighed fervently and wished he could have a cigarette. Rog nearly jumped off the fire escape when Ira grasped his arm and turned him around. The cage elevator was descending and Rog's back straightened when he saw in it the man in the golden mask!

ROG PACED back and forth in his hotel room. The air was blue with cigarette smoke and the carpet was littered with ashes and ground out butts.

"Hell!" he muttered for the seventy-seventh time. It was dark outside and still Ira hadn't appeared. The longer Rog waited for him, the more fear gnawed at him. There was a light rap at the door. Rog lunged and threw it open. There was no one outside in the hall. Rog looked up and down the hall, carefully.

"That's funny," he mumbled. "I'd a swore I heard somebody."

He turned and walked into Ira Travers who was standing behind him.

"My God! Don't do that!" Rog yelped.

Ira laughed. "I just wanted to see if you were still the world's biggest sucker. Suppose I had been one of our five friends! You would have lost enough blood by now to be thoroughly anemic."

"Where did you come from?"

"From right beside the door," Ira said disparagingly. "You have a very common habit of looking to the right when you open a door if you don't see someone standing outside. There are a lot of men, now deceased, who couldn't break that habit."

"Well, I wasn't trained to be a low criminal!" Rog sneered.

"You haven't been trained to be a corpse either, but unless you start using your head, you'll be one!"

"All right, all right," Rog grumbled. "You can give me lessons on how to stick a knife into somebody later. Right now I want to ask a lot of questions."

Ira led him back into the room. "O.K., fire away," he said, settling himself in a chair.

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"First of all," Rog began, "who in hell is that man we saw in the elevator with the face costume?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"But you said that dead man was the man with the golden mask!"

"He was," Ira replied, lighting a cigarette.

"But what about the one in the elevator?"

"Frankly, I have no idea who he is, as I said before."

"But I—oh nuts!" Rog gave up. "Suppose you tell me in your own inimitable way whatever you feel I should know!"

Ira smiled. "That's fair enough. To begin with, I knew who the man in the golden mask was from his description. Tomely had a great liking for playing the part of some holy man whenever he was working on something very important. It isn't a bad idea, you know. An Asiatic is far more likely to tell things to a leader of his faith than he is to an Englishman or even one of his own neighbors. The fact that he showed up where I am couldn't be coincidence because he was attracting too much attention deliberately."

"Did he know anything about Agharti?"

"Certainly," Ira replied. "Anyone who has spent as much time as he had in this part of the world would know quite a bit."

"If he wasn't directly connected with Agharti, why was he so interested in getting in touch with you?"

"I THOUGHT I had explained," Ira went on, "that Agharti prevents us from having more disasters than we do. Having Agharti in the world is better than having insurance. Anyway, I guessed that Tomely wanted to see me but I didn't want to be seen going to his room, hence the fire escape. It was just chance that two messages happened to come upstairs at the same time and it was just chance too that we happened to go to the wrong room first. It's quite obvious that at least one and probably more of our five friends were in Tomely's room and as soon as they read that note that Vana sent, they knew something was up and got out."

"You mean, if we had gone in the other room first, we would have caught them?"

"Yes," Ira chuckled. "Just the way a man captures a tiger bare handed. If we had gone to Tomely's room instead of that woman's, both you and I would have been pinned on the wall next to Tomely."

Rog digested this for a moment and then shuddered.

"There's nothing to worry about," Ira said. "I always get breaks like that. It's my private opinion that I must have a guardian angel or I wouldn't have lived this long."

"Nuts!" Rog snorted. "One of these days the laws of probability will catch up with you."

"It doesn't matter," Ira smiled. "I'm insured."

Rog scratched his head. "What about that guy in the elevator?"

"Probably one of our five friends. I imagine they plan to carry on an impersonation until the body is discovered."

"Why?"

"In the hope that I'll be fool enough to get in touch with the man in the golden mask."

Rog smiled. "Yes, that sounds clear. And what do we do now?"

"You wait here until you get a call for Mr. Goldsmith. Whoever calls will say that Mr. Goldsmith would like you to bring the contract down. After you get the call, go to the police station as a representative of 'Far East' magazine." Ira paused

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and took an envelope out of his pocket. "Give this to the man on duty at the desk and he'll take you in to see me."

"What are you going to do?" Rog asked puzzled.

"First, I'm going to change my clothes and then I'm going downstairs and get something to eat. I'll have something sent up to you."

"Then what?"

Ira smiled. "Then, I think I'll have an interview with the man in the golden mask."

"Oh no!" Rog groaned.

"Why not?" Ira asked. "We don't know what their plans are and I'll never find out unless I do what they expect me to do."

"Do you always work like this?"

"Usually," Ira answered. "You see, I have a theory that I have a guardian angel and I'm testing the theory. You should try it sometime."

"Oh my Gawd!" Rog groaned. "Sometimes I think everyone I know is insane!"

Ira shook his head gravely. "That's a bad sign." As Ira opened the door, Rog wheeled suddenly.

"Hey, what about that note Tomely left?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Ira said, closing the door.

Rog stared at the door for a full minute. "I wonder if there are any guardian angels," he muttered.

ROG HAD paced back and forth long enough to grind four more cigarettes into the carpet when a knock came at the door.

"Come in," Rog called without looking up. "Just leave it on the table," he mumbled as the door opened. Suddenly, the feeling that something was terribly wrong struck Rog. He turned to see the leader of the masked men holding a gun. It was quite well trained on his chest. The man was wearing a white palm beach suit and a panama hat but his eyes were the same dangerous pale blue eyes that Rog had seen in San Francisco. He was also wearing the white scarf with the little black and white interlocked rings embroidered on it that had been over his face when they first met.

"Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?" the masked man asked.

Rog seemed to have misplaced his voice.

"In that case," the man continued, "I'm going to have to ask you to sit down."

Rog sat, dumbly.

"Aren't you going to talk?"

"Ah.....there isn't much I can say," Rog answered.

"That's better," the man said. "I dislike monologues intensely. Now suppose we get right down to business. I want that envelope."

"What envelope!" Rog asked hostily.

"Come, come, Mr. Philips. Let's not play games. Hand it over!"

"You go to hell!"

The man's hand tightened on the gun. "Mr. Phillips, I'm going to shoot you through the stomach unless you give me that envelope!"

"What if you DO shoot me," Rog said with a slight tremor in his voice. "Do you think you can find it then?"

The man's hand relaxed. "I'd rather hoped you wouldn't prove too difficult."

"Well I AM proving difficult," Rog snarled.

"So I see," the man admitted, "but before I do anything drastic, I think I will try using reason."

"Go ahead," Rog offered. "It isn't going to do you any good!"

"What have you to gain, if I may ask, from this mad adventure? You already have quite a bit of money, a lucrative career, a wife and a home.

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What possible difference can it make to you whether or not there is or there isn't an Agharti?"

"I'm not going to argue with you," Rog answered. "I offered to let Ira use my half of the funds and as far as I'm concerned, he can."

THE MASKED man nodded his head. "If that's the only difficulty, I'm sure we can get around that. But before I come to that point, I thought I might mention something else. We know that you are an intelligent man and you must realize that there are two sides to every question. To date, you have only listened to Travers. Maybe you'd change your mind if you heard our side of the story."

"I doubt it!" Rog was fighting a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. His hands and brow felt clammy and his mouth, dry. He wondered if when the slug ripped through his body the pain would be bearable. He hoped he would die quickly.

"Our position is quite simple," the masked man said softly. "We are rugged individualists and we have never cared to be anyone's servant. We have investigated Agharti carefully and have become convinced that the so-called King of the World is anything but benevolent. As a matter of fact, he plans to destroy civilization. In effect, we are trying to preserve humanity and if in doing so we can also come out with a profit, does that make us villains?"

Rog opened his mouth to answer but the man cut him off.

"Remember now, your bargain with Mr. Travers was only to let him use your money which I believe amounts to approximately seven hundred thousand dollars. Now, we are sportsmen and we know that you wouldn't care to break your word so we will make a bargain. If you will give us that envelope, and leave Rangoon at once, we will give you one million dollars in American money." To emphasize this, the man brought out a fat manila envelope. "This envelope," he continued, "contains ninety, ten thousand dollar bills; ninety, one thousand dollar bills; fifteen, five hundred dollar bills; twenty-two, one hundred dollar bills; four, fifty dollar bills, and ten, ten dollar bills; a total of one million dollars!" He tossed the envelope casually to Rog. "You can count it if you wish."

Rog swallowed hard and a droplet of perspiration ran down his cheek. "If I say no, you'll kill me, won't you?"

The man nodded. "I plan to shoot you through the stomach and it takes quite a while to die that way. It's rather painful too."

Rog swallowed again. The man went on. "We had the money put into assorted bills so that you wouldn't even have to stop at the bank. Just think! All you have to do is walk out the door and you're a wealthy man."

Rog dropped the envelope to the floor and gripped the arms of his chair. He shut his eyes and whispered hoarsely. "Go ahead, you..! Shoot and be damned!"

The room echoed with the sharp report of a gun. Rog didn't move. "Funny," he thought. "I didn't feel it. Maybe I will in a minute."

The sound of a window opening brought Rog out of his trance. He opened his eyes and saw the masked man massaging his right hand, his eyes blazing. Stepping gently through the window was Ira Travers, a revolver in his hand. The masked man's gun was lying a dozen feet away on the floor.

Rog got up unsteadily and reeled across the room. He picked up the masked man's weapon, noting a shiny

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streak on its side.

"I'm a pretty good shot," Ira chuckled, "considering I haven't had much practice lately." He walked over to the intruder and ripped the scarf off his face. The man jerked back and cursed but didn't lower his hands.

"I don't think I know you," Ira said conversationally, "but it doesn't matter. Sit down!" Ira indicated the chair that Rog had been in. "Rog!" he called.

ROG'S HEAD appeared through the bathroom door looking slightly green. "What do you want?" he asked, hoarsely.

"There's some rope in your bag. When you've finished regurgitating, tie this bird up!"

Rog staggered into the room and opened his grip. As he was tying the man up, Ira continued chatting.

"You see, I had a good reason for not having your dinner sent up. After we finish questioning this character, you'll really be able to eat."

"I doubt it," Rog mumbled.

"Nonsense," Ira answered. "There's nothing like a good murder to improve one's appetite."

"Are you going to kill him?" Rog asked.

"Not until I get some information out of him."

"You won't get anything out of me," the man answered. "You're just wasting your time!"

"Immune to torture, eh," Ira laughed softly. "I doubt it very much but anyway it doesn't matter."

"What do you mean?" the man asked, his eyes dilating.

"I learned something new the other day," Ira explained, "and I've been just aching to try it out on someone." Ira drew a small paper wrapped package out of his pocket. Opened, it revealed a bottle, full of a milky fluid, and a gleaming syringe. "You should enjoy this," he said. "I found my experience quite interesting."

The man strained at his bonds but Rog had done a thorough job.

"What about the shot?" Rog inquired. "Somebody will come investigating!"

Ira chuckled. "You've been writing too many detective stories, Rog. No one will even give it a second thought."

"They will when they find him!"

"I'm not going to shoot him," Ira said pleasantly. "I'll just cart him up to the roof and heave him off."

Ira walked toward the man with the filled syringe. The man struggled violently.

"Hold still! Otherwise, I'll have to inject this in one of your eyeballs!"

The man stopped struggling abruptly. A few minutes later, the man's head dropped limply forward. Rog pictured his body hurtling through the air and striking the street with a hideous thud. His face assumed its green tinge again.

"I think I'm going to be sick," Rog muttered.

"Go ahead," Ira smiled. "It'll give you a bigger appetite for dinner."

With a groan, Rog rushed into the bathroom.

WHEN ROG returned from the bathroom, Ira had apparently finished his questioning. He was sitting on the edge of Rog's bed and glanced up as Rog came into the room.

"Do you feel better?" Ira asked.

"Not much."

"You will after you've had some dinner.

"I'm not hungry," Rog growled.

"Do you think it would help your appetite any if I told you I'm not going to kill him?" Ira asked.

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"It would help some," Rog admitted, "but what ARE you going to do?"

"I don't know," Ira replied. "I'll decide that after dinner."

Ira and Rog left the room shortly and as they walked down the stairs, Ira began explaining. "I didn't want to talk in front of 'sleepy' because he's awake now but I figure it should take him about forty minutes to escape."

"You're going to let him go?" Rog asked.

Ira nodded. "I have to. When I questioned him, I found he didn't know too much about the actual plans. There's another member of this gang besides the five. The one upstairs is the actual leader but number six is the financier behind it all. Number six is the man who has the golden mask."

"Do you know who the sixth one is?"

"No," Ira answered, "and neither do the other five. He's always contacted them by telephone and sent money by mail. The first time they met him was in Tomely's room. He got there before they did and somehow got Tomely to swallow the bamboo pill. After Tomely died, Number six put on the yellow robe and the golden mask. When the others got there, he was dressed in that costume so we haven't any clue to his identity except what Tomely wrote. I think I know what he meant but I'm not sure yet."

They reached the dining room and walked in. "You'd better stoke up," Ira suggested. "You won't get another chance before morning."

Later when the meal had arrived, Rog leaned across the table. "How will we know when he escapes?" he whispered.

"As I said," Ira muttered, "it'll take about forty minutes for him to get loose. I left some glass exposed in the bathroom and it will take at least forty minutes before he cuts himself free."

"Yes," Rog whispered, "but how will you know for sure!"

"His car is right outside," Ira replied softly. "I emptied all the gasoline from the carburetor and let the fuel line drain back into the gas tank. It'll take two or three minutes for gas to pump back into the carburetor when he tries to start it."

"Well, what do we do then?"

"We're going to hitch a free ride on the back bumper of his car."

Rog gulped and laid his fork down. "Me too?" he asked.

"You too," Ira smiled.

Rog shrugged and took a sip of his foul tasting coffee. Soon they left the dining room and went into the hotel lobby. Ira killed some time by examining a rack of thumb-marked post cards while Rog fidgeted. Finally, Ira turned and strolled slowly out the door into the street. With apparent leisure, the two men walked to the side of the hotel. Ira selected a dark doorway and drew Rog inward.

"When you move out of here, crouch low and try not to jar his car. Whatever you do, keep your head down!"

"All I can say is I hope you're right about that guardian angel," Rog answered.

"Oh, that only applies to me," Ira smiled. "I'm quite sure I'll get through this but you'll probably get killed."

Whatever Rog was going to say was cut off by Ira's hand over his lips. An instant later, a figure in a white suit walked rapidly to the black sedan.

"It's him!" Rog whispered.

Ira jabbed him viciously in the ribs with an elbow. The starter on

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the car growled, stopped and growled again. Ira detached himself from the building and silently crept up behind the car. Rog followed and both men gently eased themselves onto the rear bumper. All the while, the occupant of the car was muttering under his breath and furiously grinding the starter. Suddenly the engine sputtered and caught. The big car rolled from the curb and began moving through town at a moderate pace. In his exposed position, Rog felt he was the object of every eye and was quite puzzled that no one noticed him.

THE CAR slowed about a mile beyond the city. Just before it came to a complete stop, Ira dropped off, followed by Rog. Quickly the two men ran for the side of the road and stopped, watching. In a moment, the driver of the car emerged and started walking toward a small hut, a short distance from the road. Shortly after the man entered the hut, a light flickered through one of its windows.

Ira motioned Rog to follow and silently they approached the tiny building. When they had reached the side, another car drove up and stopped. Four men got out and walked rapidly to the hut. Rog and Ira cautiously peeked through a crack in the wall. Four of the five men were visible. They no longer wore scarves over their faces and Ira had a chance to study each intently. The fifth men moved into the line of vision and Rog drew his breath in sharply.

"You know him?" Ira whispered.

"Yes," Rog breathed. "It's Buck Sanderson, a California confidence man."

"I only know one of them," Ira whispered again. "The short, fat one with the black hair. His name is Achille Galluso, affectionately known as 'Sandbag'."

Another car approached from the opposite direction from which the other two had come. Like the others, it drew up and stopped. The occupant of the car snapped on a flashlight and walked toward the hut. Quickly, Ira grasped Rog's arm and guided him around behind the hut. The newcomer played his light around the front and then snapping it off, entered. Silently, Rog and Ira stole back to the crack in the wall. The stranger was plainly revealed and it was the man in the yellow robe and the golden mask. He was speaking to the other men in a strangely muffled voice, "—plain that you have failed to take Philips out of the way. Travers, however, is the most serious of the two. If you have any explanation, Carter, I'll be glad to listen to it."

Ira's former captive shuffled his feet. "I don't quite know how to begin. I did as you instructed. As soon as the bellboy telephoned that Travers had left, I drove directly to the hotel. I parked my car for an easy getaway and then slipped in through a side door. I waited for about fifteen minutes and when I was sure Travers wasn't coming right back, I went up the stairs to the room. I gave Philips a lot of psychology and tried the million dollar bribe but I didn't think it was a trap. That Philips was a hell of a good actor! After he had strung me along for about twenty minutes, he tells me to go ahead and shoot.

"That must have been the signal because Travers shot my gun out of my hand. He'd been sitting outside the window on the fire escape and had a little crack to shoot through under the window. They had me cold and tied me up. Then Travers gives me a shot of pentothal so I guess I

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shot my mouth off all over the place. Just before he gave me the pentothal I heard him tell Philips that he was going to heave me off the roof. When I came to, I kept my eyes closed and heard him say that he wasn't going to kill me. Then they went out of the room and I finally managed to get loose. I got out of the hotel, made sure I wasn't followed and came out here."

THE MAN with the mask struck Carter a stinging blow with the flat of his hand. "You fool! You've not only bungled the job of getting rid of Philips but you've given Travers another million dollars to fight us with!"

Carter cringed but said nothing. The man in the golden mask turned and paced the floor while the others stood waiting for him to speak.

Impulsively, Rog whispered in Ira's ear. "Say, what's in that envelope you gave me? I forgot all about it!"

"Three sheets of writing paper," Ira muttered.

"What's written on them?" Rog insisted.

"Nothing!"

"What do you mean?"

"There're merely blank sheets of paper."

They stopped talking as the masked man started speaking again in his muffled voice. "What about that envelope that Travers left with Philips?"

Carter shrugged his shoulders. "I couldn't find it!"

"You blithering idiot!" the masked man shouted. "He didn't hide it! It was in his coat pocket. I saw Travers hand him the envelope through the window and Philips put it right in his pocket! As soon as I saw you arrive, I left. I assumed that you, at least could take care of a simple situation!"

Carter started to reply but the man in the golden mask cut him off. "Never mind your excuses! What's done is done! Travers knows all about us but he doesn't know our exact plan. It's only a question of time though before he'll have that figured out. There's only one thing for us to do. I'm going to tell you the plan now and we'll put it into operation right away before Travers can do anything." The masked man paused and struck a dramatic pose. "I allowed the rumor to escape that we are a band of wealthy men who are planning to loot Agharti. Our method was supposed to be by means of some new gas which was to be released in the city. To carry this still further, we purchased that plane and allowed it to be seen several times. Since you thought that was the truth, Carter, undoubtedly Travers does too but the real plan is this."

The masked man drew a small glass tube from the folds of his robe. "This gentlemen, contains a virus, heretofore unknown. The only things I know about it are that it is deadly beyond belief and there is no cure and no possibility of immunization. This virus also has the property of dissolving in water and most organic solvents, and most important of all, forms a solution in air. This vial contains a heavy concentration, dissolved in a liquified gas. You will take this vial to the restaurant where Travers was yesterday and while three of you command the place with guns, the other two will search out the hiding place of The Man From Agharti. It's probably a basement room. When you find it, rap on the door. As soon as the door is open, throw this vial inside and run! Before The Man From Agharti realizes what has happened, he will be infected and he will immediately return to

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Agharti to find out what effects this has had on him. I know their medical diagnosis is done by a machine and I'm equally certain that this machine will show him to be perfectly normal. So he will carry the infection into Agharti and in three weeks, Agharti will be a city of the dead!"

"Yeah, but how do we get into Agharti?" Carter asked.

THE MAN with the golden mask laughed. "As I said before, there is no known cure but this virus has one redeeming feature. Within a month's time, it undergoes a transformation when in an air solution. In its new state, it dies. To be on the safe side, we'll wait six weeks and then we can search Agharti at our leisure. We may even stay there and control the world if we want to!"

One of the five men spoke. "Where did this ah—stuff come from?"

"That I couldn't say," the masked man answered. "About four years ago, a meteorite fell in northern India. I happened to be in the vicinity with a friend and we both went to the site and found it had fallen near a native hut. The native had been quite curious and had studied the meteorite from all angles. It was apparently made of ice and there was still a chunk about a foot in diameter. My friend was quite a scientist so he purchased this and put it in our truck. I took some photographs and went south to mail them to the U.S. When I returned, I found my friend dead. Not only that, there was nothing left of his body except the skeleton. I found his notebook and discovered that he had done quite a bit of research and had isolated this terrible virus. He had also found that it would live indefinitely when frozen or when in solution of certain solvents. I said nothing about this when I returned to the United States and engaged a bacteriologist to make further tests. He said nothing since I promised him a share from the looting of Agharti. He was a little too talkative, however, so I was forced to make one more test of the virus, on him."

The man with the golden mask laughed. "Fortunately, all of the research was complete and this aerosol vial was already prepared."

The faces of the five other men in the room whitened.

"Now, do you understand what you are to do?"

The men nodded.

"Fine. Now one more word of caution. Be careful that you have no cigarettes lighted when this vial is broken. The gas in which the virus is dissolved is quite explosive. In case The Man From Agharti should have a flame in his room, shoot it out before you break the vial."

Without another word, the man with the golden mask laid the vial gently on a table, turned and left.

Instanty, Ira grasped Rog's arm. "Run about fifty feet and throw yourself on the ground!" Ira ordered. He gave Rog a violent shove. As Rog ran, he glanced over his shoulder and in the dim light saw the glint of Ira's revolver. Even as Rog fell to the ground, something seemed to strike his body and a muffled roar shook the night. Through dazed eyes, Rog saw the walls of the hut burst outwards and a yellow mushroom of flame engulfed them.

SHAKING, Rog got to his feet and half ran toward the ruins. As he reached them, a figure arose from the rubble and stood weaving.

"Ira!" Rog yelled. "Are you all right!"

"I guess I've still got my guardian angel," Ira said weakly. He shook

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his head to clear his senses. "Where did he go?" he coughed.

"Who?" Rog asked blankly.

"The man in the mask!"

The sudden starting of an engine answered Ira's question. One of the parked cars speeded away. Limping, Ira started running toward the street. Rog put an arm around him and together they made it to the road. Ira struggled into the driver's seat of the black sedan and Rog jumped in beside him, slamming the door. There was a pause while Ira fumbled around.

"Thank God he left the keys in the car!" Ira muttered.

The starter growled and the engine came to life. Quickly the big car gathered speed. The road was narrow and treacherous but Ira grimly held the accelerator to the floor. With bated breath, Rog watched the speedometer roll to the top of the scale. The car lurched and heeled as Ira dodged obstructions and ruts and twice they ran off the road and back on. Rog's senses began to reel but Ira's face remained set.

Suddenly Ira spoke. "There he is!"

Even as Rog looked, the two tail lights winked out. "He's gone!" Rog exclaimed.

"No," Ira murmured through clenched teeth. "There's a branch in the road up there and he wants us to think he took it."

They drew abreast of the fork and the big car leaned heavily as Ira wrenched the wheels left. Rog covered his eyes. Ira snapped the headlights off and spun the wheel the other way. Somehow, someway, the sedan stayed upright and Ira managed to keep it on the road. Now they were tearing down the same road at breakneck speed, without any lights. Tail lights reappeared in front of them and Ira clung to them like a leech. They were approaching the outskirts of Rangoon and the man in the golden mask made a sharp turn. Ira's tires squealed as he followed an instant later.

"Damn!" Ira muttered. "He knows we're behind him!"

Ira snapped the headlights on again. The car in front picked up speed and Ira's foot again tramped the accelerator to the floor. Turn followed turn, right and left in breath-taking succession as the masked man tried to shake off his pursuers. Twice the heavy sedan Ira was driving sideswiped objects in the narrow streets. Once the car in front struck a cart standing in the roadway and skidded crazily, but the driver managed to get the car under control again.

As suddenly as it had begun, the chase ended. The masked man's car struck a slippery spot as he was turning a corner. The tires shrieked protestingly as the car made a complete half circle and faced the other way. Ira wrenched the wheel of the sedan to avoid a collision and almost made it but the front wheel struck the other car and the sedan spun around, sliding on two wheels before crashing broadside into a warehouse. Rog fell heavily onto Ira as the sedan turned on its side.

For a long time, shock and nausea overcame Rog. Then he shook Ira gently. Ira's head rolled limply against the door sill and blood began to trickle down over his face.

THE CRASH of a revolver shattered the silence and the upholstery by Rog's shoulder jerked. Almost without thinking, Rog felt inside Ira's coat and pulled out Ira's gun. By straddling Ira's inert form, Rog was able to stick his head through the door window of the car. Immediately there was another shot and something stung Rog's cheek as

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the bullet ricochetted on the door sill beside him. Instinctively Rog ducked, and then sticking the gun over the edge, he fired blindly at the man in the golden mask. He peered out and saw the masked man scuttling behind his own car. Rog pointed his pistol toward the other car and squeezed the trigger. A sign, high on a wall of the warehouse, rang like a gong as Rog's bullet struck it.

The man in the mask laughed. "Quit aiming at me, Philips, and you might stand a chance!"

Rog fired again and the bullet spanged off the street.

"Nice try!" the masked man called. "You have two more bullets! When you've used those up, I'll kill you at my leisure!"

Rog hesitated for a moment, then, bracing the gun with both hands, he jerked the trigger. The gun exploded and Rog held his breath.

"One more shot!" the man called. "Then I kill you!"

Rog waited, hoping the man would show himself, his hands holding the gun tightly. Suddenly, the golden mask appeared beside the car. Rog's gun crashed again and the bullet dug a gouge in the wall across the street.

"Missed again!" the man in the golden mask yelled. He stepped into full view. He was a terrifying spectacle, standing beside his car, the long yellow robe apparently adding inches to his height. The golden mask over his face looked more inhuman than ever in the dim illumination. The eyes of the mask were slanting, expressionless slits as he began to walk slowly toward Rog.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" Rog called, his voice breaking.

"Don't make me laugh!" the man snarled. "There aren't any more bullets in your gun!"

Rog didn't answer. His trembling hand merely tightened its hold on the gun.

The man stopped walking about ten feet from the car. "I'm going to kill you, Philips, because you're a meddling fool!" Slowly the man in the golden mask raised his gun. As the man in the golden mask took careful aim, the weapon in Rog's hands fired and a black hole appeared between the slanting eyes of the golden mask. Soundlessly, the yellow figure toppled forward, his gun emitting a muffled bark as his body fell on it.

ROG HUNG limply on the door sill, his stomach knotting horribly. From beneath his feet, Ira called hoarsely, "I guess you got him, eh Rog?"

"Yes. I got him," Rog answered weakly.

Slowly, Rog climbed out of the car and turning, assisted Ira. A moment later, the two men stood in the street. Ira's left arm hung limply at his side.

"I'm afraid it's broken," Ira muttered, "but we'll attend to the first aid later."

They walked over to the prone figure and Rog gingerly turned him over on his back. He removed the golden mask and stared. Except for the hole in his forehead, Rog might have been looking at a tranquilly sleeping, Steve Merrick.

"I was afraid it was Steve," Ira said slowly. "I'm sorry too. In his own way he was a likeable guy."

Rog said nothing.

"Well, we've got to get out of here," Ira said. "Now that the shooting is over, the police will be showing up."

They walked over to Steve's car. "I'm afraid you'll have to drive," Ira said edging into the car.

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Rog nodded and climbed into the driver's seat. Ira gave directions and Rog broodingly drove where he was told. How much time passed, Rog didn't know. He felt empty of all emotions, devoid of any feeling.

Ira finally spoke. "It's hard to kill a man."

"Yes," Rog sighed. There was a short silence. "Where did that other bullet come from?"

"It's become a habit with me to reload my guns as soon as I've used them. I put in a fresh cartridge while I was still lying beside that hut."

There was another long silence.

"Do you think we are infected with that virus?"

Ira shook his head. "No, I'm certain the heat of the explosion saved us that."

As they approached the center of Rangoon, Rog drove more cautiously. Ira pointed with his good arm. "Turn left at that corner," he said, "and park the car in the middle of the block somewhere."

Rog turned and they drew to a stop. They casually left the car and walked up the street. Ira glanced up and down to make sure they were unobserved and then pulled Rog into a doorway. Ira rapped lightly and a moment later a face glared out at them. The glare faded abruptly as he recognized Ira. The two men entered and Rog noticed that it was the kitchen of the restaurant that they had been in before.

The man guided them to the concealed stairway and held the drape aside for them to pass. When they reached the foot of the stairs, the door opened and Vana Shanu smiled at them. The giant black man put his arm around Ira and helped him inside.

Vana nodded to Rog. "Sit down," he offered.

Rog sank heavily into the indicated chair and the giant laid Ira on a small couch.

"I'm afraid my arm is broken," Ira grimaced.

Vana produced a small bag from under the couch and began withdrawing strange looking instruments. He slit Ira's sleeve and gently examined the arm.

"It could be worse," Vana said, "but on the other hand, it could be better."

From a small bottle, Vana brought forth a small capsule which Ira obediently swallowed. Vana turned to Rog. "It's an anesthetic," he said, "so don't worry. He'll be all right."

AS VANA worked, Ira related the story. Finally, Vana straightened and put away the instruments. There was a small pink band around Ira's arm that looked something like rubber. As Ira talked, he flexed his arm and fingers.

"That's about all there is to it," Ira finished. "After that, we took Merrick's car. Rog drove and we parked it about a block and a half away. I doubt if the police will ever connect it up with the restaurant since no one saw us come in."

Vana smiled at Travers. "My friend, we've owed you much in the past and now we all owe you our lives." He turned to Rog, his eyes shining. "And to you, we owe more than we can ever repay."

"Oh, he's coming out pretty well," Ira chuckled. "We still have quite a bit of money and if we split fifty-fifty, he should have enough to last him several lifetimes."

Rog shook his head. "No Ira, I don't want a cent of that money. You can do anything you like with it as long as I don't have to go on another adventure with you."

Vana looked at Ira. Ira shrugged.

"It seems to me, Mr. Philips,"

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Vana began, "that you should have some token of the gratitude which Agharti feels." He reached into the neck of his tunic and brought forth a small gold chain on the end of which hung an emerald, nearly three inches square. He drew it over his head. "This stone has been worn by the Chief Counselor to the King of the World for many thousands of years. For what you have done, we would feel honored if you would accept this emblem."

Rog's hands shook as he accepted the priceless gem.

"Should you ever wish to come to Agharti," Vana continued, "we should feel greatly honored."

Rog shook his head again. "I would like to," he said, "but I'm going to try to live a very sane, normal life from now on."

"As you wish," Vana sighed, "but should you ever change your mind, you will always be welcome." He turned to Ira. "Now that the danger is passed, my friend, I shall go back to Agharti. I only wish that you both were coming with me but I know you will not. Someday perhaps—, at least, we shall hope so."

Vana turned and left the room.

Rog heaved a long sigh. "He's quite a guy isn't he."

Ira nodded his head. "He sure is."

There was a long silence then Rog asked, "Well, what do we do now?"

"Now," Ira replied thoughtfully, "we can behave like normal human beings. We'll get our bags, board our B-29, and go back to the good old U.S.A."

Rog nodded his head. "Indeed it is the good old U.S.A.!" A puzzled frown spread over his face. "Say! It just occurred to me. This whole affair started when we went up to Merrick' s studio. He was going to show us a dero, wasn't he?"

Ira grinned broadly as he nodded.

"Then does all this mean that *Steve Merrick* was one of the dero?" Rog asked.

"How should I know?" Ira replied, "I only know what I read in AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES!"

* * *

So Rog has tried to live a sane, normal life in his little house, high on a hill overlooking a lake. Occasionally though, when he is alone, he opens a little box and looks at a huge emerald. His eyes get a faraway look and when he closes the box, he can always hear a deep, resonant voice saying, *"Someday perhaps—at least, we shall hope so."*

HEAT FROM BELOW

★ By LESLIE PHELPS ★

ABOUT TWO years ago, this magazine reported enthusiastically on the development of the heat pump, a reverse refrigerator whose coils took heat from the earth several hundred feet down and delivered it to the interior of a home. It was essentially just a huge refrigerator operating in reverse using the bowels of the earth as a heat-sink or pool. Well, is it working successfully?

The answer is yes. A fairly large number of such installations—several hundred—have been made all over the country and they're being studied closely. Physically they work perfectly, doing their job of delivering the heat. There are a number of reasons why they haven't become more common. For one thing other fuels, such as gas, oil and coal are still cheap and in plentiful supply. Also the electric power required to run the compressor motor is still a shade too expensive to bring the process down to the level of the average consumer. This however is a mere detail. If and when the need arises, we're sure that the heat pump will become one of the major methods of supplying the home with warmth in winter.

It is interesting to speculate that if ever installations for men are built on other planets, the heat pump will prove a useful energy source for warming the domes or compounds. We haven't heard the last of the heat pump by any means...

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Revolt in Pacifico

By ANTHONY B. OTT

The Mollusca seemed all powerful, and man bowed to the will of the sea creatures with humility. Was slavery to be his fate?

"STROKE HARD, Little Ones; my carapace is very soiled and needs the brushes badly."

The words were said with a sibilant sound that imitated the hissing of the water in the Mollusca's pool. They slithered through the damp sea air and touched the ears of the Workers like a tender caress. In spite of his strange thoughts, Solan shivered.

The distorted, leathery orifice that served the Mollusca as a mouth, voiced words of approbation as the three Workers redoubled their efforts. Though Solan had served Kask a hundred times, along with his two companions, in the oft-repeated process of purification, he was always impressed, both with the pleasure of serving the rulers of Pacifico and with receiving their approval. In some dim, concealed chamber of his brain the rites of the temple seemed to be involved. It was good to serve.

Solan applied his brush with increased strength, vigorously removing the accumulation of sand, of organic growths, of minute barnaculae. The monstrous, ten-foot length of the Mollusca trembled with satisfaction as the sweetly reeking residue was removed from his shell.

To Solan, to whom flowers were unknown, the cloying scent of decay, mingled with the briny dampness, was a perfume whose assault on his nostrils was the incense of an ancient rite.

Solan stepped back from his work and leaned on the long-handled brush while Thorale plied a high-pressure salt-water stream over Kask's recumbant form. Thorale's jet sought out the innermost crevices of the chitinous structure that was Kask's form and swept from it the sand and loosened barnaculae.

Solan had performed his duties in the chambers of Kask ten times a hundred times, and yet each time seemed more satisfying than the last. What greater privilege could be given the Little Ones than serving the strange inhabitants of Pacifico? Was he not fortunate that he was allowed to do this? What great gods were there who had created men to do these services for the huge Mollusca, the imposing Crustacea, the gigantic Arthropoda?

To Solan's admiring mind it made great sense indeed that these noble creatures should rule Pacifico—for that matter, should rule all time and space. Solan was not quite sure whether or not they did—but that they should, he was certain. He was fond of comparing himself and his cohorts with the Mollusca and the Crustacea and envy tinged him more than once when he saw how trivial the comparison was. How could the fragile structures the Little Ones called bodies, stand up to the magnificent shells of the Mollusca, or the incredibly strong cartilaginous chitin of the Crustacea? Occasionally Solan dared to wish too that he might

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The giant eel was attacking the trapped girl as Solan hurried through the depths toward her . . .

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have been born a Mollusca. He exhaled a sad sigh and resumed his brushing.

PRESENTLY Kask, the Mollusca wriggled his ten foot, shell-covered body, a sign that he was satisfied and the ablutions were at an end. The three men stepped back from their labors and awaited the commands of the glistening Mollusca. The bluish light from the glow-tubes overhead bathed the washing chamber in an eerie, eye-annoying light. He was disturbed lately over the fact that in spite of himself, he would find an occasional depressing thought entering his mind. Why this should be, he didn't know. He was happy. Take this matter of the light. The penetrating blue-green glow-tubes suited the Mollusca. Therefore was not it logical that they should be most pleasing to the Little Ones? Of course. They should!

"I am pleased, Little Ones," the hissing voice of Kask's Molluscoid mouth interrupted Solan's speculation. The huge staring single eye, with its multiple facets fixed on the three men. Solan trembled under the penetrating stare. He felt so humble before this masterful creature, this noblest of beings.

"I shall leave you now. I am going to the Chambers of Repose. You know when to return." The Mollusca shifted his ponderous bulk with a pair of tentacular flippers. "Thorale—" the man quivered and stood erect stiffly, with his head bowed as became a man —"you will report to the Procreation Chambers when the thought is sent—which will be soon—remember to watch the machine—" here the Mollusca gestured toward the clock set into the wall of the cavern—"and be glad that I selected you for the honor."

Thorale nodded his head in understanding. Kask, the Mollusca sent his massiveness into the pool with a single flip of a tentacle and vanished into one of the numerous Tubes which ended at the pool. A swift current caught him and he disappeared toward the Chambers of Repose where he would join his kind in feeding and in resting.

Thorale looked at Solan, and glanced casually at Xephos. "I am afraid—I want the honor—but I am afraid." It was rare that men spoke with one another and Solan was surprised.

"Do not be afraid, Thorale," he reassured the man. "It is for your own good. I would be happy to serve the Mollusca in any way they wished. It is our purpose."

Thorale looked up and sighed. "I am foolish. I should be overjoyed." He shrugged. "We'd better go now."

The three men took their breathing helmets from the niches in the wall and slipped them on. Transparent glassite helmets with the oxygen creating apparatus enabled them to live in water as well as the Mollusca themselves, providing it wasn't too deep. Even as he put his helmet on, Solan was thinking with gratitude, how wonderful of the Crustacea to create these things for us, so that we too can share the joys of living in the sea. The three of them picked their tridents—five foot magnalium rods tipped with titanium-barbed spearheads in the traditional trident form —and calmly stepped into the pool. Each chose his respective Tube. As the rushing water bore Solan toward the Shallows where he might hunt or relax as he chose, he thought of the marvels of Pacifico. While he hadn't traveled very far, he knew that the whole sea coast was honeycombed with countless miles of Tubes filled with rushing water. A system of transportation of such efficiency

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could hardly be dreamed of by any but the magnificent Mollusca.

Solan was a skillful swimmer, but it was not necessary for him to swim. He allowed the rushing water to carry him along, exerting only enough effort to stay near the glass-smooth walls of the concrete Tube in respect to the other traffic of Mollusca, Crustacea, and Arthropoda who leisurely drifted toward their important destinations.

He held himself insignificant as became a man. Deference had to be shown to the Mollusca and it was small enough gratitude for all the kindnesses they had shown men. Did they not provide the food, the Resting Chambers, the recreations, the very reasons for being for men?

SOLAN SLIPPED past many intersections and levels of the Tubes. Choosing his desired direction with the skill borne of long practice. Never once did he so much as bump another denizen. He liked the sense of motion and of calm that he felt when in the Tubes. The glow-tubes here were more subdued, the Mollusca not as critical or observant, the myriads of other men self-contained. Solan felt as if he might ride on forever. Was ever a man so fortunate?

He glanced frequently at the passing inhabitants of Pacifico, admiringly. What a beautiful creature, he thought, as a fifteen foot crayfish slid by in all the pomp and glory of a full-grown Crustacea, its claws and joints hugged to its chitin-covered body. A moment later three Mollusca, their pearl-gray shells shining and their tentacles trailing, passed him by. A wave, almost of self pity, washed over the man as he apologetically examined his own soft white body, its rippling muscles a mere nothing in comparison with the powerful Pacificans. Without a shell or carapace, a body covered by a loincloth and an air-helmet felt so inadequate. Solan shook his head. He would have to stop this envious musing. It was leading to strange disturbing thoughts, thought which he knew men shouldn't think.

Suddenly Solan taughtened in every nerve and fiber. The spaced glow-tubes winked three times. The dimming was caused by something unknown although it had been happening with increasing frequency. He knew that this was the sixth time the dimming had occurred within the last ten sleeping periods. Exactly what it meant he did not know, nor had the Mollusca offered any explanation.

He passed by a small group of Crustacea who were communicating animatedly among themselves. But he could not make out what they were saying. Then through the water Solan sensed a peculiar pulse of energy, a light feeling of energy; to his distinct knowledge the velocity of the water stream in the Tube decreased. He saw the Crustacea now become excited and there was much motion of their antennae. Why should the water stream of the Tubes slow down unless one of the pumps were broken? Even with his limited knowledge of Pacifico, Solan knew that the Tube was kept in motion by huge pumps. He had once spoken very briefly with a man whose duties included tending the pumps.

Yet for a simple breakdown, the Crustacea seemed extraordinarily excited. In a subtle way Solan sensed that this was unusual—for he had never seen one of the rulers of Pacifico ever excited under any circumstances.

Solan passed under a vertical exit. He could see up the shaft and the diffused daylight at its end. I shall pause, he thought. The Shallows can

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wait and I have time. And his desire to see the sky for a moment was curiously linked with funny feelings that had lately been annoying him. Like a trim fish he shot toward the opening. No other creatures were using it. Lithely Solan rose from the slowing coursing stream of water and seized the bottom rung of the widely spaced ladder. The exit, like all facilities of Pacifico had been designed for the Mollusca, and not men—the rungs were spaced four feet apart and climbing was an exercise. Without thinking twice about it, Solan's nimble hands and feet sped him up the wide ladder. Fifty feet of climbing and he was on the surface.

Breathing heavily, he removed his air helmet and slung it from his back. He looked into the sky.

Solan was a creature of the sea even though he was a man and an air-breather. So much of his life had been spent underwater with an air helmet that he regarded water as his habitat. Yet more and more in these recent times he found himself liking the occasional trips to the land surfaces that he found occasion to make. He liked the breathing of fresh air, the feeling of winds—and even once water had fallen from the sky. He didn't know why, but he felt much at ease and restful when the light from the sky shone on him.

It was dusk and the red ball of the sun was already sinking rapidly into the Western Sea which bordered all Pacifico. The sun was to Solan's right and straight ahead of him, far distant, was a pillar of light and flame raging high into the sky. He looked curiously at it. There must have been some sort of an accident at one of the pumping stations or Tube junctions to the south. He watched it, detached and interested at the same time.

A HUMMING sound suddenly began filling the air. Alarmed, Solan wheeled to the right. Coming from the vast barren reaches of the Western Sea, riding high in the sky so that they almost appeared as pinpoints, were seven glistening, shimmering slivers of metal. With his lack of long range judgment, Solan could not make out their size, but he knew they must be large. Smoky red trails emanated from their tails—they looked like metallic fish. His interest captured completely, Solan stared fascinatedly at the strange visitors in the sky. They sped rapidly across the stretches of water. The humming increased in volume.

Then to his surprise, the weird projectiles dipped their noses and appeared to be coming to earth at a very steep angle. Puzzled and afraid, Solan flung himself to the ground still watching. He saw them plunge straight into the coastline at least a dozen miles away. There was a brilliant flare of light, followed by two more flashes. Then a thunderous sound came across the intervening space.

A tall pillar of black smoke began climbing into the sky from the point where the strange objects had struck. Solan didn't know what to make of it. Was this the source of the strange tremblings and sounds which had assailed him lately in the Tubes? Was this possibly the reason for the blinking of the glow-tubes preceding those odd tremblings in the water Tubes? Solan was not brilliant but he could see a reason, a cause and effect relationship here. Never encouraged to think, by the Mollusca, he had a certain native ability to do so. There definitely must be a relationship between the strange phenomena he had just witnessed and the oddities of recent happenings in the Tubes. Thinking mightily, Solan replaced his air

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helmet and entered the vertical shaft to return to the Tube. He watched the smoke column drift with the wind as he disappeared into the shaft.

As he descended, he heard a scraping below him. He crouched to one side to allow a pair of huge, handsome Crustacea to climb past him. The leader paused and stared at him.

"Where are you coming from, Little One?" he asked briskly. "Were you watching the cursed Ayshan—"

"—Svaskul! Have you gone mad?" The second Crustacea nudged the first with a huge claw. "The Little Ones know nothing of this."

"They'll soon find out—the Ayshan rockets are no joke," the first one said. "Maybe we can use the Little Ones."

"Let's not talk about it now, Svaskul. The Little Ones might become alarmed which is the real reason why we shouldn't bother them with our troubles." He turned toward Solan, fixing him with his extensible eyes. "Go, Little One," he said not unkindly, "and do not think or speak about what you've seen. You have nothing to fear as long as you are a faithful servant of Pacifico." The two Crustacea went up the shaft.

Once more in the water and moving toward the Shallows, Solan thought about what he had seen and heard. Something was alarming the Mollusca, his rudimentary thought-processes told him—and it was all connected with the blinking light-tubes, the tremblings in the Tubes, the strange talk of the two Crustacea about—what were the words?—"Ayshan?" and "rockets?" They meant nothing to him in themselves. He made a mental note to ask someone later, possibly even Kask, his personal master.

A short while later Solan came to the last Tube before the Shallows. He slid into it. You could always tell when you were near the Shallows by the fact that fish were present. He saw numerous small sea creatures drift past him. He took a firm grasp on his trident. The Shallows offered fine hunting but they were filled with danger too.

HE REMEMBERED only too well how close he had come to dying when a huge octopus, ensconced in a rocky crevice in the Shallows, had caught him with a wandering tentacle against which his trident and his knife had been utterly useless. He still bore the scars of that encounter, the round markings of the octopi-mouths. Fortunately, a Crustacea had been hunting for pleasure too and had spotted his plight. Solan recalled with a glow of admiration, the dashing sweep of the Crustacea into the fray. With a half-dozen strokes of his mighty seven foot claws, he had cut the huge octopus to shreds.

This time he would be careful to stay away from the crevices. The Tube spewed him into the ocean Shallows. Overhead the natural light filtered through the twenty foot depths. It was strangely brilliant—and satisfying. The Tubes were the greatest handiwork of the Mollusca but they thrilled Solan less then the open sea-shallows.

Swimming gracefully, gliding through the water with complete effortlessness, Solan made a dozen passes and caught as many wriggling fish on his trident. He strung them through a line and let them trail behind him, attached to his loin-cloth. He tingled all over for the water in the Shallows was quite a bit cooler than that in the Tubes. He felt stimulated as always. But the Mollusca had often warned men not to remain in the Shallows too long. Bad chills and cramps might seize them.

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He spent a half hour accummulating his bag of sea-creatures. It was about time to return to the rest-chambers. He was beginning to feel fatigued with the day's events. And like the healthy animal he was, he wanted rest. Through the crystal clear water for the distance of a quarter of a mile he could see a half-dozen Tube mouths entering the water. He headed toward the one leading to the shortest way to the rest-chambers.

Abruptly a sound impinged on his ears. The feeble tones, muffled by the water, could barely be heard. "Help—Oh help me!" the frantically piped words conveyed their message of danger. Solan glanced around. For a moment he could see no menace. Then to the right, not far from a tube mouth, a large clump of sea-vegetation concealed the drama he was seeking. He saw a slim torpedo-shape making for the vegetation. Kicking himself into motion, he attempted to head off the shark. Since he was closer it was not too difficult. He rounded the flowery growth and spread before his eyes was the danger-picture.

A Little One—like himself—was trapped before the clump. It was a female—that he could see by the long sleek hair—and her foot was wedged securely in some sort of a shell. She was wielding her trident skillfully but weakly, fending off the attack of a huge eel which was staining the water with its blood from a half-dozen wounds which she had inflicted on it. But it came back with ever-renewed vigor, spurning its own cuts. Once inside her guard, and it would be all over. The sharp, blood-sucking mouth of the vicious sea-creature would fasten on her in a flash.

Solan saw why she screamed so desperately. The shark headed straight for her, would force her to divide her defense—an impossible thing to do with the lightning fast eel menacing her. Like an arrow from a bow, Solan propelled himself to her side two seconds before the shark was on her. His trident shot out in a skillful thrust, and it caught the twelve-foot length of the sea-devil in the jaw. Wounded, but feeling no pain, the shark bored in. Fending him off, Solan thrust again. Leaving the trident sticking in the monster, he slid onto the shark's back and with ever more skillful thrusts, he drove his long knife blade home, again and again. The water became dyed with the blood of the shark, and in few minutes it was over. The eel attacking the girl left his intended prey for the easier target of the dead shark.

Solan went over to the girl. She was breathing heavily behind her helmet and there was terror on her face. As he reached her side, the pain of her trapped foot and the horror of the last few moments, conquered her. She fainted. Weaving with the water currents like an exotic flower, she remained trapped. Prying skillfully with his trident, Solan managed to spread the shell open and extract her foot. It was bleeding slightly but otherwise appeared uninjured. Solan towed her lax body along with his haul of fish toward the mouth of the Tube.

WHEN THEY reached the protection of the Tube he felt her wriggle into consciousness. He turned and she tore herself from his grasp. A twist of her body and she swam rapidly from the mouth of the Tube along the submerged cliffside. Then she vanished.

No social structure existed in Pacifico and Solan had never felt any real desire to associate with anyone or to speak with his fellow men.

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Service to the Mollusca was sufficient pleasure unto itself. Yet, he found himself speeding right after her—his curiosity getting the better of his lifelong habit. Who and what was she? Why did she avoid coming into the Tube mouth? These questions, for some unaccountable reason required answering. Solan was going to get those answers.

It took him but a moment to locate the cavern opening into which she had disappeared. He swam in. To his surprise it was lighted from above by a shaft leading to the surface of the beach and lined with glow-tubes. Puzzled, he looked around and saw that the shallow cave was blocked by a concrete wall at one end. Then he realized that this was a closed, abandoned Tube mouth. He climbed the shaft and emerged onto the beach. Though it was night there was enough moonlight for him to see clearly.

The beach was small and isolated backed by a towering cliff-wall, punctured by numerous cave-entrances. Pure chance led him to the one occupied by the girl though she made no real effort to conceal herself. Intead she stood at the mouth of the cave, her helmet off, her hair awry, a badly worn trident clenched in her hands. She was breathing heavily and there was the frightened look of the hunted animal on her face. She waved with the trident.

"Go away," she gasped.

Solan felt sorry for her and at the same time she looked so ridiculous that he was constrained to laugh. He tore off his air helmet.

"Don't be afraid," he answered as reassuringly as he knew how, "I won't hurt you—you know that. Tell me who you are—can't you find your rest chamber?"

The girl looked at him bitterly. "I can find my rest-chamber," she said. "Go away. I am grateful for what you did. Go away before you get in trouble."

If Solan had conformed to his better judgment, to his basic instincts, to his sense of desire for material comfort, he would have immediately turned away and forgotten about the matter. But there was something about this creature that fascinated him. He was not consciously aware of her sex for he knew the females were always intended by the Mollusca for the breeding chambers, and it was an automatic taboo to stay away from them. Nor was it exactly sympathy, an emotion with which he was unfamiliar. Nor was it regard for another human being for the only consideration he had learned was for the Mollusca. Yet his interest was compounded of all these unknown and forbidden elements. So he said:

"I will not leave until I know about you. Now talk to me and tell me."

With that he sat down calmly in the sand, laid his trident aside and waited for her to speak.

Then like a flash, she was on him. Her trident poised before her, sped at his throat. The astonished man deflected it with a quick stroke of his arm and it sank into the sand harmlessly. The girl fell on him groping for his knife. Solan was so startled that it was hard for him to realize that she was trying to kill him. Then he felt an emotion which amazed him. He became angry. He grasped the girl roughly and pinned her shoulders to the sand. He slapped her across the face with his open hand.

THE GIRL surprised him again. She began to weep. It was the first time he had seen anything like this. He wasn't sure what the tears signified, but he felt a strange feeling of kinship with this unhappy

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creature. Still holding her firmly he said:

"That is enough fighting for now. I will let you up if you promise not to try to hurt me."

The girl nodded mutely. Solan released her. She sat down heavily near him and buried her face in her hands. He felt a compulsion to reach over to comfort her but restrained himself.

"I am Solan," he explained, "a worker for Kask, the Mollusca. If you come with me to him, he will tell you what to do. Come with me to Kask."

"No! No!" The girl shuddered violently. "I hate them! I hate all the Mollusca, all the Crustacea."

This was simply the rankest heresy that the astonished Solan's ears had ever heard. Why should anyone hate the Mollusca? He tried to collect his thoughts and assimilate the idea that there were Little Ones who did hate the Mollusca. Solan sat down once more and continued to think. What should he do about this girl?

The problem was taken from his hands. There was a rasping scraping sound of a heavy body being dragged through a shaft and the single-eyed reptilian head of a Mollusca appeared. The huge shell followed the head. The rank scent so familiar to Solan's nostrils clung to the Mollusca.

The girl stared at the creature transfixed, her face a mask of terror. The squeaking voice of the Mollusca piped forth:

"Coreena," it began gently and matter of factly, "you have run away from the Breeding Chambers—now you must return. I will see that your punishment is light for you are simply a foolish female." The Mollusca swiveled its head in Solan's direction. "Who is your Master?" it demanded.

"Kask, and I am Solan. I found the girl in the Shallows while I was hunting. I wanted to take her back."

"I doubt that," the Mollusca said coldly. "I will see that Kask hears about this. Return to your rest chamber for now."

Solan bowed his head, picked up his trident and started toward the shaft leaving the Mollusca and the girl in the cave's mouth. He felt a strange unwillingness to abandon Coreena—but the will to obey was so firmly embedded in his nature that any other course was unthinkable. Then he heard a scream.

He turned. Coreena was standing facing the Mollusca, who was slowly advancing on her. A tentacle lashed out, curled around the trident and tore it from the girl's grasp. A pair of tentacles flicked out, caught the girl firmly and held her still. Her eyes were glazed with terror. Another tentacle began lashing her across the back. She opened her mouth and the scream of agony shuddered through Solan's frame. Ordinarily he would not have thought twice about the matter—the Mollusca was doing a deserved duty—it was not in Solan's province to dare to interfere. Yet he felt a powerful urgent kinship with her—despite the fact that a minute before she had attempted to spear him. The pitifully beaten girl struggled in the Mollusca's grasp. The tentacle came down across her body with tremendous force. Solan wheeled about, taking a firm grip on his trident. His mind was a maze of confusion. The tentacle made another slash and Solan saw the skin at the girl's shoulder split under the stroke. She cried aloud again.

Solan frowned. In two jumps he was across the intervening space. Without full realization of what he was doing, the three-pronged trident spitted the monstrous head of the Mollusca. The Mollusca never knew how he died—all Solan was conscious

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of was the astonished single eye of the Pacificon, wide with amazement.

As the Mollusca fell dead to the sand, the girl tore herself free from the tentacles and threw herself into Solan's arms. To his surprise—and yet delight—his own arms tightened around her and he crushed her to him. He whispered words of consolation. She clung to him furiously, sobbing and crying her gratitude.

THEN SOLAN realized what he had done. The enormity of the crime he had just committed confronted him. He had never before ever heard of a Little One harming a Mollusca of a Crustacea. But he had just done so. Stunned he sat down on a rock and stared at the recumbant form of the Mollusca.

Presently he became aware of the girl sitting at his feet. She had wrapped her open cuts in rags of cloth. Her voice whispered softly:

"Solan," she began.

"What?" he asked dully.

"I must thank you for saving me twice—but I'm sorry you're in trouble too."

"Why did I do this crazy thing?" he asked, more of himself than of her. "I don't understand—I want to serve the Mollusca. Kask will send me to the death chambers just as I deserve."

"Solan," the girl repeated his name again and it was like a caress. "You killed Sanxa for me— he would have sent me to the breeding chambers. Be a man, Solan—run away as I have done. Run away with me. We will leave Pacifico. We will go to the east where there are no Mollusca, no Crustacea."

"And leave the sea?" Solan demanded. "How would we live? What would our purpose be?"

"I don't know," Coreena replied, "But anything is better than dying. I want to live my own life," she went on passionately, "Don't you see, Solan. We are no more than servants and slaves to the Mollusca. Why should they be our Masters?"

Ten minutes ago, Solan would have heard her heresy with horror. Now he was listening with respect. A funny feeling of such self-respect had come over him that he could hardly credit it. The training of twenty years was too strong to vanish in a half hour however. He was still confused.

"Would you like to hear the real story of us Little Ones?" Coreena's voice interrupted his reverie. More from, the desire to collect his thoughts than to listen to any stories, Solan said yes. She began slowly, organizing her own thoughts as well as repeating much from memory but what she said first startled, then caused Solan to think deeply. There was truth in her words.

"The Breeding-Mothers told me this, Solan," Coreena began, "for they are very, very old and remember many things we ordinary Little Ones forget or never know. In the beginning, the world was ruled by men who were always fighting with each other. This was countless eons ago, many times the span of a single lifetime. Finally they made war upon each other with such violence as we cannot possibly imagine.

"They had strange weapons of overwhelming power and they rode in the skies and on land and under the sea as easily as we swim." Coreena watched Solan's face as she told her incredible story. "It is said by the Breeding-Mothers, that the Mollusca and the Crustacea were each as small as your hand."

Solan snorted. "I am to believe *that?*"

"The Breeding-Mothers say it is true." Coreena defended.

"I can believe men ruled the

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world," Solan admitted, "but the Mollusca could never have been so small."

"Then how could man have ruled the world?"

CONFRONTED with this contradiction, Solan shrugged. Coreena resumed her story.

"Anyway, the war became so fierce that men destroyed practically all other men with weird weapons which poisoned the seas and the land. The Breeding-Mothers say that the Mollusca thrived on this strange poison and became as large and as powerful as they are now. And they eventually enslaved men to the purposes for which they use them today. So we are the Little Ones for whom the Mollusca have found use."

"Is that all there is to your story?" Solan asked sarcastically.

"No," replied Coreena. "There is one more thing. In some parts of the world, *men still rule!*" She said the last so passionately that Solan looked up startled. He seized her by the shoulders.

"Coreena—is this just a story? Are you lying to me?" He shook her. She twisted from his grasp.

"No," she said, breathing heavily. "I swear it is true. If you could get into the Breeding Chambers you would know that the Breeding-Mothers do not lie. They have passed this history from one to another down through all time."

"Go on," Solan said, releasing her.

"Those noises and the funny things in the sky that we see sometimes are machines run by men! They are trying to destroy the Mollusca! The Breeding-Mothers swear it is true because they have overheard the Mollusca talking about it. The part of the world still ruled by men is called 'Ayshan' and lies far beyond the reaches of the Western Ocean."

At last Solan realized that there was certainly an element of truth in Coreena's strange tale. Had he not heard the Crustacea talk of 'Ayshan' and 'rockets'? In the next few minutes, Solan made up his mind. He had never before felt as he did now. Whatever the end, he was going to pursue this thing to its origin. He looked at Coreena who was staring at him as though awaiting a blow.

He lifted her to her feet. "Coreena," he said gently, "I am going to help you. And I am going to find out the truth of this strange tale. We shall see. But first we must hide you. Let us throw sand over the Mollusca so that his body isn't discovered by chance or by some searchers."

Quickly the two threw a coating of sand over the prostrate Mollusca. Then they descended the shaft and Solan guided Coreena along the Shallows until they came to another similar abandoned cave-opening which had formerly been a part of a Tube mouth.

As she entered the shaft ahead of him, she stumbled and would have fallen had he not caught her. As his arms went around her to support her, they involuntarily tightened and suddenly she was pressed against him. His mouth came down on hers and her arms crept around his neck. They remained locked in the embrace for a long time while a kaleidoscope of confused thought and feeling made riot with Solan's mind. He had never imagined such an act—much less done it. The exquisite pleasure, the thrilling contact of lips, the warmth of Coreena's body sent his pulses racing—what was this? Finally he released her. She said nothing but there was a warm smile half concealed by the curve of her mouth.

"You remain here, Coreena," Solan said briskly to cover his confusion. "I will visit here regularly and bring food. Don't let yourself be seen." He

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shook his head. "I need time to think. So much has changed in these last hours."

The next few days were busy ones for Solan. He did his work for Kask as usual. He attended the Rest Chambers and the Recreation Chambers. He delivered food to Coreena.

No hue and cry appeared to be raised over the disappearance of Sanxa the Mollusca. There were more, many more puzzling dimmings of the glow-tubes. Once a Tube was shattered by some strange force and the Mollusca and Crustacea worked frantically with some Little Ones to repair it rapidly and dispose of the bodies.

All the while Solan tried to think of a plan of action, urged on by Coreena. The more he associated with her the more convinced of the truths she had made he became. But there seemed no opportunity to act.

ONE DAY after he had finished his chores with Kask, the Mollusca's reedy voice issued from its mouth-opening with an order. "Solan," it ordered, "instead of going to the Rest-Chamber, you will follow me to the Rooms of Council. I have already spoken to the others."

Surprised but obedient, Solan reported as he had been ordered to a place he had never expected to see —the Rooms of Council. The First Room was a huge circular amphitheater carved in the rock and illuminated as before. Lolling on the stone benches bathed by sprays of warm sea-water were hundreds of Mollusca, their cohorts the Crustacea, and a few Arthropoda. And there were easily a hundred Little Ones, all trusted servitors of the Mollusca. These latter were distributed among the Mollusca. Solan and Chronos and Zenol remained near Kask.

On a raised dais in the center of the chamber reposed, a huge, wrinkled ancient Mollusca, his shell streaked and mottled with venerable age. Under other circumstances and at a time not long ago, Solan would have felt nothing but reverence for one so gifted in every way. Now he felt a faint revulsion, a feeling that was becoming more common to him each day and which he correctly attributed to his knowledge gleaned from Coreena. After all, he told himself, he was a Man...

The Mollusca on the dais began to speak, if so the reedy whistlings could be called. The gaping simulated mouth opened and closed like a fish out of water. The sound was disgusting to Solan—but the sense and meaning confirmed all his new-found beliefs.

"I have called this assembly," the monster began, "to show the Little Ones how much we regard them and to allow them to participate in a plan I have arranged. It is not necessary for me to explain to our brothers what our intentions are, but for the sake of the Little Ones, from whom we demand absolute silence under the pain of death, I shall clarify a condition which has arisen and which demands correction.

"Listen closely, Little Ones for you are to have the privilege of aiding your Masters in a great event. Far across the reaches of the Western Sea, remote beyond your farthest conceptions, lies another land called Ayshan. We have never spoken of this land before, simply because there was no reason to. We have been content to live in comfort and security with our Little Ones, guiding them and permitting them to serve us. So it has been ordained by the gods.

"But in this land of Ayshans are many many millions of Little Ones who have revolted against and overthrown their benevolent masters—

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and now they are makin' war upon us, intending to destr / the beautiful social order which we have created. Naturally they cannot do this. We will not permit it. Many times you have seen vehicles which travel with great speed through the air, and have heard tremendous sounds. These are the products of the fiendish science of the Ayshans. They have inflicted some damage upon us. They have powerful explosives and many of these aircraft which they call 'rockets'. And their raids and attacks upon our domain of Pacifico are becoming more frequent. It is our intention therefore to stop them."

Solan listened to the glib talk of the Mollusca—it sounded entirely too smooth to him in light of what he had been hearing from Coreena, from other frightened Little Ones, and from the frequency with which the light tubes were dimmed. The Mollusca and Crustacea were being hurt and were alarmed at the attacks. But one thing puzzled Solan. Why confide now in the Little Ones? How could they aid the Mollusca in warfare against the Ayshans?

"We have called you, the most intelligent and best fitted of the Little Ones to assist us in this project. We are permitting you to share in the honor of destroying the Ayshans. We have built a vehicle which will travel under the Western Sea.

"This undersea craft is capable of holding only a limited number of operators—we are going to place fifty chosen Little Ones—chosen from among you—along with ten Mollusca. We have designed powerful explosives beyond anything you could imagine. With this craft and these weapons you are going to destroy the major city and fighting center of the Ayshans—a city called Toko.

"The vessel has been built and the fifty men chosen for training will begin at once. Remember that you are privileged beyond conception to participate in this great venture."

THE GREAT old Mollusca moved down from the dais, and the Little Ones began a babble of conversation among themselves at the astounding turn of events. They plied their masters with hundreds of questions. Solan thought of Coreena and his heart was filled with despair. Then gradually as he sat thinking, a tremendous idea flooded his mind.

He had little opportunity to do much more. The training did begin at once. From knowing nothing about technology, the chosen fifty Little Ones were hurled into what was to them a new world. It was a world of mechanisms and gauges, instruments and tools. The training went swiftly. The clever Mollusca had truly designed an ingenious machine. The vessel was a long slim pencil that could dash through the water speedily without betraying its presence. It was equipped with fantastic instruments and the Mollusca worked harder than anyone making the Little Ones understand their individual functions. The Little Ones were told nothing of the weapons or their nature. This was left for the Mollusca. The Little Ones were simply a part of the submersible, an extension of the tentacles of the Mollusca.

Solan worked, at Coreena's behest, harder than anyone. His natural brilliance coupled with Coreena's inspiration and coaching made him a natural leader and the Mollusca reposed considerable confidence in him. Shortly he was appointed Leader of the Little Ones and negotiated directly with the Mollusca. This gave him considerable freedom.

It was without too much difficulty then that he succeeded in smuggling Coreena aboard the ship several days

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before it was to sail. He prepared a small hidden compartment for her and he succeeded in keeping her supplied with food without much trouble. Meanwhile he spent every possible opportunity in feeling out his fellow Little Ones.

He had to laugh almost at the respect and gratitude they felt for the Mollusca who so honored them—but then he would have felt the same a short time before. Everything hinged on a single chance—he and Coreena must convince the other Little Ones, when the time was ripe, that the Ayshans were people like themselves, free and not under the domination or slavery of the Mollusca.

The chance came the rest-time before the submersible was to leave Pacifico. The Mollusca were getting their last orders and their plans ready, preparing whatever terrible weapons they had designed. And so they left the Little Ones to their own devices in the shell-like grotto in which the submersible was sheltered.

Limited in their ability to entertain themselves, and excited by the prospects and fears before them, the Little Ones conversed among themselves. Solan knew that it was a case of now or never. Once aboard the submersible he would never have a chance to speak with the entire group together. He was about to reveal the intentions he had of taking over the submersible when it occurred to him that talking about it now would be too dangerous. The whole plan might be upset. Suppose one of the Little Ones became cowardly and traitorous? What guarantee had he that the idea would be taken sympathetically? He decided to wait...

THE SUBMERSIBLE had been at sea a day already and Solan was with the Mollusca, Kasten, in the control room. Solan eyed the shell-covered monster who became more hideous each day in his eyes.

Kasten spoke: "You may rest now, Solan."

Solan nodded submissively and left the strange machine he controlled knowing nothing about it except that it steered the vessel so long as he followed a spot of light with the hand-wheel. He walked back to the resting room through the narrow metal corridor. He turned right at a little alcove and in an instant held Coreena in his arms.

"Coreena," he breathed against her ear. "I must do something soon—I think I will approach some of the men now."

"Let's both go," she said, "they'll understand the seriousness of the situation if I am there to confirm it. They have never seen men and women together—as we." She lowered her eyes.

"It is best," Solan agreed. "We'll both go now."

They found their way to the resting room in which about thirty of the human crew of the submersible were gathered in various states of rest or activity. When Solan entered with Coreena, he became the center of focus instantly. A hundred questions poured out at him. He let the wave of excitement die—then he began speaking.

"Men," he said, and his voice rang out with the proud word, "we are going to break a chain which most of you don't realize exists—" and from there he went into the complete story of everything Coreena had told him—including the stories of the Breeding-Mothers. In the end he asked for their help in making his plan come true. They must overpower and destroy the Mollusca and the Crustacea—not an easy task, but a necessary one—and then somehow

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make contact with the Ayshan.

He sensed an uneasy feeling when he had finished his long speech. There seemed to be little enthusiastic response. The men remained dull and unconvinced. Then a whistling voice grated on his ears. Turning he looked back of him. In the open doorway, bulked the ponderous mass of a Mollusca and Solan turned white with fear as the words of the creature struck him.

"I am astounded at your hatred and lack of faith in Pacifico," the monster was saying, "especially after the responsibility we invested in you. Solan, you must die immediately—and the girl." With simply that, the Mollusca shifted his massiveness in Solan's direction and his huge tentacles unsheathed themselves.

Despairingly Solan realized the game was up—and yet, in his breast there was still hope. He looked wildly about for a weapon. No trident was at hand. Suddenly a heavy metal bar was trust into his hand. Coreena had removed a lever. At the same time she flung a metal bucket at the Mollusca.

THE BEAST was almost upon Solan when he reacted. Swinging the ponderous metal strip in a huge arc, he ducked under the leading grasping tentacle and caught the Mollusca's flabby head a mighty blow. Pole-axed, the unconscious creature's mighty weight dropped to the floor plates. But right behind him was a Crustacea, gigantic claws reaching out for him. In the cramped quarters of the submersible there was little space to move. Desperately Solan thrust out with the rod. It sank into the pulpy brain case of the Crustacea, even as the horror's claw nipped his shoulder letting the blood stream forth.

Coreena was already reducing the unconscious Mollusca's head to a bloody pulp with a hammer that she had removed from a tool rack. The whole battle had occurred so rapidly that the men in the resting room had hardly had time to get to their feet. In one brief instant of time they had seen their whole social system overthrown, their Masters killed before their eyes, and the fact that man was the superior demonstrated so clearly to them.

Clenching his steel bar, Solan demanded of them as he faced them with determination to die in his tracks if they refused to join him. "Are you going to believe in me and help me now?"

A mighty chorus of agreement assailed his ears. Amazed at his fortune, Solan accepted their loyalty.

"We must divide ourselves into small groups and wander through the submersible," he explained. "We must kill the remaining eight Mollusca—seven Mollusca and one Crustacea. Strike for the heads without giving any warning—we shall succeed then." Proudly Solan looked at Coreena. Her eyes answered him.

"Will we be able to make contact with the Ayshans?" a voice from the rear of the group of men asked.

"We can try, Solan answered. "At least we know that we can reach the land. I have learned enough about the controls to work this submersible. And all of you know your jobs. The only difference will be that we won't be ordered to the fiendish intentions of the Mollusca."

In one sense Solan was disappointed by the attitude of the men. They seemed to accept the change of events so matter of factly. He knew however that this was due to the innate subservience almost built into them by the years of subjection without question to the orders of superiors.

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He knew the feeling well. It had been a very short time since he had felt the same.

Immediately he made preparations for destroying the remaining Mollusca. He assigned the men in small groups, he taking command of one of them. He didn't know whether the others would exhibit sufficient audacity, so he led the way. Proudly Coreena followed close behind him. All were armed with tridents now—or substitute weapons like knives.

The first place they headed for was the control room. On their way they would pass the resting room of the Mollusca—they knew there were none of the monsters at their back.

When they reached the resting room, Solan boldly flung open the door. He stepped in, and in various states of repose, he found five Mollusca. They looked up startled, their ten foot shells making rasping sounds as they dragged themselves erect.

"What is it you wish?" one demanded. "What is the meaning of this intrusion?" Solan said nothing. Instead he plunged directly at the speaker, sinking without hesitation, his heavy trident in the juncture of the creature's head and neck just outside the heavy shell. The greenish blood spurted as he withdrew the weapon—and the creature died. The Mollusca took the measure of the situation. As the men poured through the doorway behind Solan the Mollusca unsheathed tentacles and grabbed for anything loose to use as weapons. In a moment the room was a shambles.

THE MOLLUSCA sold their lives dearly knowing they were doomed. Practically unarmed, completely unsuspecting to this moment, they fought as well as they could and the dead bodies of fifteen men testified to their power, but their vulnerability to trident-strokes and knife-slashes at the head and neck, nullified the tremendous power of their tentacular arms.

The battle didn't last very long. The five creatures were soon down, although their pipings and shrillings must have been heard by the others in the submersible.

The battered bleeding Solan, cut in a score of places, followed by his little horde of revolutionaries headed immediately for the control room. Here they knew they would encounter the remaining two Mollusca and the Crustacea. They had no fear. Having just destroyed five of the monsters—they knew success was theirs.

They poured into the control room. A whirlwind in the form of a Mollusca carrying six knives in its tentacles struck them and before they could kill it by sheer weight of numbers, the gigantic beast had destroyed six men. At last Solan's heavy knife severed it's head and it flopped to the steel plates its life gushing out with its blood.

The remaining Mollusca and the Crustacea fought bitterly too. But in a little while it was over and the submersible remained filled with twenty-five battered humans and many corpses along with the reeking bodies of the Mollusca. By the dint of much effort Solan organized a party to pile the bodies in the Mollusca's rest-room and an effort was made to clean up the vessel and make it bearable to humans—even Solan no longer thought of himself and the others as "Little Ones."

Hastily he set to checking the course of the submersible, seeing that it was operating properly. The whole bloody fray had taken less than an hour. In that time the submersible had not changed its state appreciably. Now it was a matter of persisting in maintaining the course and direction;

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sooner or later Ayshan would be encountered.

Solan and Coreena repeated their story of what had happened and how the whole artificial world of the Mollusca had come about. He spoke of the glories of man and his intention to raise man in Pacifico to his former estate. It was a simple tale, really, little embellished, and told with a quiet fury and intensity that impressed the men. Coreena spoke of the horrors of the Breeding Chambers and the whole pointlessness of existence under the Mollusca—of the fear of Ayshan that the Mollusca had, of their intention to destroy the Ayshan.

"We do not know what weapons are aboard this submersible," Solan said, "but we will turn everything over to the Ayshan—they will assist us in freeing men. There will be no more 'Little Ones' and the Mollusca, the Crustacea and the Arthropoda will die to a beast."

He stood at the control periscope and his arm tightened around Coreena's waist.

"And when Pacifico is once more ruled by men, all of you will know happiness," he continued, addressing the assembled men. "And that will not be far away. The Ayshan rockets will see to that." Solan was surprised at his own satisfaction in using the strange words.

He and Coreena peered instantly through the periscope while the others went about their work of controlling the various portions of the submersible. "Coreena," he whispered in her ear, "will we really find the Ayshan?" The girl looked up at him. There was a lovely smile on her lips. "Of course we will, my Solan, of course we will..."

THE END

SHADOW PICTURES

★ By Cal Webb ★

USEFUL scientific inventions are frequently the result of sheer chance or accident. Many great discoveries have been made with luck being the major factor. It is the quick witted scientist or engineer who seizes on these accidents and converts them into useful techniques who contributes much. Such is the case now surrounding the electron microscope.

It seems that such an instrument was being built. It has been known for a long time that it is difficult to adjust and align an electron microscope because it is so easily subjected to stray influences, particularly magnetic and electric fields. What to do about it? Well, the common practice is to shield it with layers of sheet metal thus isolating it from the extraneous influences.

But at the National Bureau of Standards, scientists hit on another tack. Couldn't this property of sensitivity be used in another way? It could. And so they did it. An electron microscope, like a cathode ray tube, has as a prime element, a beam of electrons. This beam deflects when influenced even slightly by a magnetic field. Now magnetic fields are particularly hard to measure and define and picture. But the Bureau scientists, have placed a mesh between the beam and the fluorescent screen it impinges on. When a magnetic field comes near the beam, the shadow cast by the mesh changes and pictures the field perfectly. Thus a convenient and accurate survey of the disturbing influence may be plotted. It is ingenious and logical.

This is only one example of how a clever mind can turn a defect into an asset. If we searched the literature of science it would be quite easy to find hundreds of instances where similar discoveries have been made with luck holding a high hand in the deal. One of the greatest examples of this is probably the invention of the regular three-electrode, triode vacuum tube, one of the world's most important inventions. Here chance played a great part in introducing that third element, the grid, between the cathode and the plate. By that single change, a whole new world was opened up, a world which gave us radio, television, movies, sound recording, and from which the Lord alone knows what else will come!

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HOLLYWOOD GETS SET!

☆ By June Lurie ☆

HOLLYWOOD is waiting, crouching and preparing to leap, like a cat waiting for a mouse. The eyes and ears of the film community are closely attuned to a form of entertainment which is beginning to capture a surprisingly large segment of the public taste—science-fiction. As in most new ideas in the film capitol, each group waits to see what the other will do. The minute there is sign of movement the others will hop in.

Right now, it is an unknown quantity, but there must be very many scripts and scenarios awaiting the word to be made into films. The film producers haven't been blind to the fact that science-fiction and fantasy have been increasing in volume and quality in recent years. S-F is receiving recognition from many quarters including the influential book reviews. Furthermore, Hollywood has had a limited and successful experience with fantasy and horror type films.

Now all that remains is that some big producer do a first rate job on a first class science-fiction story. There are innumerable ones to choose from, ones which would not necessarily be too difficult to film. Consider many of Rog Phillips' fine stories of atomic warfare. These would be perfectly adaptable to present techniques. Then from such a start, films concerning interplanetary travel and spacial rocketry would naturally follow. The few examples we have seen of this sort of thing have been bad, totally bad, but occasionally a good piece of work has crept through. So the stage is set. And we make a prediction—hold us to it, even though we think it's safe:

In the next ten years Hollywood will come forth with a rash of S-F films that will satisfy us all. And while it will take time to get going, it is a sure thing that in the next two or three years, the first of the films will come forth. Then, once the precedent has been set—then, watch out! The rest will follow automatically. Here's hoping!

* * *

GLASSBLOWING

☆ By A. T. Kedzie ☆

GLASSBLOWING is one of the oldest and yet one of the most modern of the arts. For despite its basic nature and assumption by machines, it still retains the color of an art. All of the old routine glasswork of blowing bottles and containers, of working it into plates—all these things are better done by machines. And a glass factory of today is a miracle of modern mechanical and electrical science. But the art of hand-glassblowing is by no means forgotten. It even makes its appearance in many everyday things. The common neon advertising sign is largely handworked. Fine tableware is handblown. In general the touch of the artist with the glass blowpipe still remains with us.

Where this is seen however to the greatest advantage is in the laboratories throughout the country. In research institutions of both universities and industries, you will generally find a professional glassblower whose sole function is to shape the intricate shapes and forms needed in laboratory apparatus. Most of these glassblowers have very strong connections with European technology. That is, the glassblowers are either Bohemians or Germans, or have learned their trade from persons of these nationalities, for these countries have specialized in laboratory glass-working and their pupils have been scattered throughout the world. Fortunately the United States, through its tremendous scientific activity, is creating a school of technical glass workers second to none.

It is worth anyone's while to watch glassblowers in operation whether they are working with soft, low-melting point lead glass used in neon signs or whether they are constructing things from refractory fused quartz. Deftly, fingers manipulate materials in intensely hot flames of oxy-hydrogen torches and burners. Skillfully the semi-molten glass is twisted, blown, drawn, cut, and shaped into incredibly complex forms. With positive assurance the glassblower handles his tools and materials.

Here he might be drawing a tiny thread finer than a hair. There he may be constructing a huge still. Whatever the work, he operates swiftly and calmly. It isn't often that one has a chance to see a true craftsman at work—industry has become so mechanized—but the glassblower still works much as did his compatriots of a thousand years ago. There is no substitute for the human artistic sense nor the basic human "feel" for tools. And without skilled glassblowers the science of electronics would never have developed.

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The CRUMBLING WORLD

The walls of the tunnel began to crumble, and a shower of rock crashed down upon them . . .

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By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

Deep within the cavern Pablo felt the Earth tremble from some mighty blast on the surface. Had his refuge been discovered? . . .

"*MARIA.... MARIA,*" the sound echoed from wall to wall and from roof to floor in varied cadences, all mocking, and all empty of meaning.

The man struggled to get to his feet but the effort was too great and he only fell back to hands and knees, where he swayed from side to side like some animal, trying to gain strength again. As if the entire world depended upon his arising....

He called again in great sobbing tones: *"Maria, Mar-iaaa!"*

And from somewhere in the darkness beyond, from the grey, formless rubble, broken rock, torn lifeflesh of the earth, a voice replied:

"Pablo! Pablo, beloved! Here, my own. I am here!"

The staring, frightened eyes of the man came to life at the words: strength flowed back to his arms, to his legs, to his heart. A sound of thanks rose to his lips and fell upon the terribly still air. But now there was a difference. Gone was the mockery, gone the terror. Maria was alive. Maria had answered his call.

But where was she? He licked grey-dust lips and moved his head from side to side, his set gaze finding at last the fissure in the rock. She was somewhere beyond that crooked line of darkness. And slowly, with infinite care, as if bones had become brittle and the slightest movement might break them, Pablo came erect. Even then he did not attempt to move too quickly. Strength had to come back to him. The trembling had to cease in the long muscles of legs and arms. And after a bit that trembling stopped.

Then he walked with steady step up to and beyond the thread of blackness.

She heard his step and a sound of gladness rose in her throat that was like a song without words. He was outlined against the faint light from behind though as yet he could not see her. But the distance between them was short, though it seemed to him a lifetime went by in his moving to her. She rose from where she had fallen in a frightened huddle at the sound and fury of the single blast which had shaken the inanimate rocks, walls, and timbers of their tunnel. She had lain there, her every thought on Pablo and the life which stirred within her.

She scrambled erect and tottered to

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meet him. He enfolded her in his arms, held her suddenly trembling figure close, stroked her hair, her face, her throat, fell lightly along the rich curves of her strong full body: not in tenderness of love, but simply to reassure himself that she was here, alive, in his arms.

But she was not as he. The fact of their both being alive had been established. Now other things must be considered. What had the past brought to the future? What now? She lifted her head from his shoulder where it had rested, and stared deeply into his eyes.

"Pablo," she spoke softly yet urgently, hating to break the spell of the magic moment, but knowing there would be other moments. And if not— Her head shook in fierce, sudden movement, rejecting that thought. "Pablo, hear me—"

"Aye?" he let the word out in a windy sigh.

"What happened? It sounded as if all the dynamite in the world had been loosed in the tunnel."

"No!" he spoke surely now. "Not in the tunnel. The concussion would have killed us. Whatever caused the explosion came from above. Perhaps a bomb.... Yet I cannot think of so terrible a thing—"

HE RELEASED her and stood, head bowed a little and eyes thoughtful in measured concentration. Pablo's mind was not swift in action. It had to be sure of something before it set to work. This explosion which had occured with such suddenness and terrible effect had been caused by something beyond his power to imagine. Suddenly he felt a numbness, as if the blood had in an instant congealed through his entire body.

The lift! Their escape hatch, their path to life, their road to the world of sky, mountains, to the air, sharp as a knife blade... Was it still there? He whirled, no longer lethargic, or thinking of his weakness, grasping her wrist as he did, and ran toward the cavern he had just quitted.

The torches still flickered in smoky gusts. But the tunnel was closed at the end from which the stope had been made.

Maria guessed what was on his mind.

"Do not despair!" she said sharply. "It cannot be closed altogether. The torches are burning still, and as we ran I felt cool air against my face—"

He controlled himself with an effort and bent his will to thought. The appearance was not truth. He thought back. There had been this terrible blast of sound and wind. Rock had fallen in a torrent about him yet he had escaped unharmed. He looked about and saw where the pick had fallen from his fingers. It lay alongside an immense fall of rock which had piled itself into a pyramid which extended to the ceiling, blocking off the exit to the lift. Or had it?

He moved toward the fall, a slow man, heavy and sloping of shoulder, thick and wide of chest, whose face was full, muscular, with deep-set eyes whose mirrored thoughtfulness held their counterpart in his long thin lips.

He stood by the pile of stone and earth and searched its striated face for a fault which he could attack with pick and shovel. Nothing. He turned to say something to Maria. But she was not behind him. Instead, she was some three quarters of the way into the tunnel, her head thrown back, her nostrils dilated and her eyes intent on a spot close to the roof.

Her voice came to him:

"It is here, Pablo. The wind comes from somewhere above—"

He moved to her side and followed

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the line of her gaze. He could feel a cooling breeze upon his upturned face. It was air fresh as that of the mountainside. Yet there was no opening to show the source of the draft of air.

Once more it was Maria who hit on the solution:

"It comes not from above, Pablo, but rather from the side. See.... The pressure is so great it seeks any vent.... Let us follow the vein of the fall—"

They found it at the far end of the stope. The reason they hadn't seen it before was because the vein angled off in an abrupt turn at that spot. They stood side by side, and stared with wondering awe-struck eyes at the miracle which had been performed seemingly but for their benefit alone.

There was terror, fear and awe in the woman's voice:

"Pablo-Pablo! In the name of God! What has happened?"

He said nothing, but held her closer as he stared somber-eyed at the immense cone of light which streamed down on them in a long gentle slope from the vast opening above. It was as if a giant drill had gone to work on the side of the mountain.

"Hush, woman!" he said sternly after a few seconds. "Perhaps it is not for us to ask in the ways of God.... Let us be content that a way out has been shown us."

He moved forward, bending his heavy squat body at an angle, holding the miner's pick high up the shaft should its use be needed. Maria followed almost on his heels, her body also bent as his was. It was hard to say which was the man, for they were dressed alike in heavy woolen shirt and formless, bag-like trousers. The likeness was carried further in that her hair had been piled high on her head so that the cap-like beret could contain it all. It was when one's eyes came to her middle that one realized that they were not of the same sex.

The angle of the slope was gentle and their hobnailed miner's boots provided excellent traction, and oddly, though the top of the shaft must have been a full two miles off, they made better time than they imagined they would. Yet gentle though the slope was, Maria had to pause now and then for rest. Her time was not far off, she knew, and she was afraid that her time would come in this very shaft.

APATHY lay heavily on them. The outcropping of stone against which they leaned held little warmth for the sun was descending. The long climb had tired them both and though they were both mountain people, the high, sharp air made the breath whistle through their nostrils. Then awareness came to Pablo's sullen oddly-muddied eyes and his head moved from side to side as he looked about.

"Look you, Maria!" he commanded after a moment. "The village.... It has been smashed! And there, the mine tipple—"

She turned and saw why he had paused. It was bent and twisted in a grotesque pattern. She made the sign of reverence and pressed closer to him.

"—Perhaps, perhaps the guards have been killed, Maria?" he asked in sudden passion.

She was the quicker-witted. While he could only think of the hated guards her mind was already bent to the possibilities which might be, from what they'd seen of the smashed village and the ripped tipple. Hers was the greater urge to freedom. Her eyes blazed in frantic light and her lips twisted in a bitter smile.

"Pablo!" her fingers pulled at the rough cloth, bidding him to silence. "The guards no longer matter. See!

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We have come out on a kind of shelf and if you will but look closely, you will see that there is a winding path down the slope. It leads to the river. It may be a while until someone comes to investigate. By that time we can be well on our way. Besides, the sun will soon be down. All is to our vantage—"

He had begun to nod his understanding even before she was through. At the last he started toward the path she had pointed out nor did he turn to see whether she was following or not. Her words had proved the goad to action.

Darkness came as they reached the flat. A brilliant moon gave strong light and showed the river as a silver sheet winding between green-bordered banks so dark they looked black. They paused on the bank until Pablo oriented himself, then continued to the narrow wooden bridge which spanned it at that point.

Now everything was clear to him. Beyond the bridge lay the farm of a man named, Callaori. And beyond that the many acres of the nobleman, San Montero. Pablo searched back into his mind and remembered, though the memory was clothed in a haze, that there was a path which led to the concrete of the highway. The path led from the bridge directly to Callaori's house, then swung away at a right angle until it met with the highway.

Maria's voice, hoarse now, accented with pain, made him turn to her again:

"Pablo! Please, husband mine! I must have something to give me strength. Anything. A bit of cheese, bread, even wine—— I cannot go on, Pablo!"

Pablo too was tired. He knew that hers was a different nature. For one thing, she was a woman, and though she had done man's work, it was because she had been forced to it. And for another, her time would be soon. What had happened in the past few hours did not make things easier for them. He had to risk breaking into Callaori's spring house. There might be dogs....He sighed softly at the thought. There would be worse than dogs, he knew, once they came to where people lived in cities.

"Rest here awhile. I will see what is to be seen. I will call your name so that you will know it is me. Do not take a chance but use the guns upon anyone else...."

He was gone with all the stealth of animal on the prowl.

The thatch-roofed home of Callaori loomed suddenly in the pale green light. Darkness veiled its interior. Not a sound from within or without was heard. Yet Pablo knew the man kept hounds. Pablo crouched in the protection of a hedge and pondered the situation. There was a single conclusion. Whoever crossed his path would meet death. Slinging the rifle over his shoulder Pablo streaked across the intervening path of moonlight, straight for the house. His trigger finger was set about the guard of the submachine gun, ready for instant action. A hundred feet then half that, ten feet more, and then...

...

PABLO pressed himself against the rough wall and inched along the surface until he was a foot from the door. There was a window cut head-high in it. Pablo peered cautiously through the glass. Nothing. The darkness was complete. Slowly, his free hand shoved at the rough-hewn wood, then, as it gave, Pablo shoved hard and sprang into the room, his gun at the ready.

Nothing answered the sound of his wild charge.

The house was deserted. Pablo

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could have yelled with relief. Luck was all in his favor. Callaori had probably gone to town, was the thought in his mnid. Pablo did not hesitate to strike a light and give it to the two candles on the table. From then until his shirt was full of food, Pablo moved at a swift pace. Then blowing out the candles Pablo became cautious again, as he left the one-room cottage and started back to Maria.

While from the farmer's spring house, partly concealed by the lip of the rock overhang in the hollow in which Callaori had built it, a pair of eyes followed Pablo's every move. As soon as the man disappeared behind the line of trees, a shape left the house and set out in pursuit. It travelled on all fours, like some animal....

Pablo's shout of warning for his wife could have been heard the length of the valley. She leaped erect and ran to meet him, as he strode torward her, both hands extended, and bearing cheeses and bread, and even a small piece of meat. They sat and ate until their bellies seemed about to burst. So deep were they in their eating neither *heard* the sound of breaking vines.

It was something that was sixth sense which gave Pablo sudden pause. He turned his head slightly and put all his mind to listening. What was that sound....? Aah! There it was again, closer this time. But he could not tell from where the sound had come except that it was somewhere behind him.

The sound of the shot which broke the stillness of the night seemed to come from beside his very cheek. It was Maria who fired the shot. Pablo twisted sideways and brought the machine gun to his shoulder.

"Down, Maria!" he called hoarsely. "Quick!"

They never knew what or who it was that had stalked Pablo. For after waiting a full moment, Pablo rose cautiously, still keeping the gun pointed in the direction of Maria's target. He motioned with a backward gesture of his head for the woman to retreat to the protection of the forest. Safely within, he curtly bade her follow, and started at a dog trot through the trees, following a well-defined path which would bring them on a highway.

It was a concrete road, one built of blocks of stone set one against another so squarely that not even their joining showed. It was a through highway between Cadiz and Seville. Pablo knew he had but to watch for the guard houses set every couple of miles apart, and soon or late they would arrive within the environs of Seville.

They spotted the truck shortly after they reached the highway. It was parked half on the road with the whole of the hood slanting down toward the shoulder, and the ditch just beyond. The cab was empty but the rear was full of sacks which on investigation proved to hold grain.

"Maria!" Pablo's voice held a high note of glee. "What luck. We can drive directly into Seville and no one will be the wiser. For look you. A farmer bearing crops needs no identification. The guards do not even bother looking into the truck. I have in mind, my friend, Ramos Villerahos. Remember Ramos?"

She remembered. Too, she remembered that Ramos had bought the quayside tavern he owned with blood money. Still Ramos owed Pablo a debt of eternal gratitude. Pablo had sheltered Ramos when the Nationalists took the village and they looked for Ramos who had betrayed supporters of the Nationalists.

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"Yes. I think Ramos will help us," Pablo continued.

IT WAS strange that neither thought or wondered about the strange natural phenomena, or pondered even a little on the peculiar cone of light which had had the power to slice through all that granite and rock formation. Yet it was not so strange. For both were peasants of Andalusia, sons and daughters of stock which had been in the land since the days of the Romans. The beliefs and terrors of a half dozen religions and certainly three races were breed deeply in them, and their breed had known the invasions of a number of the most savage peoples the world had ever known. Curiosity extended only the tips of their fingers, the touch of their tongues, and the grips of their toes. What they saw, *was*, needed no interpretation or understanding.

The woman, always the most courageous of the sexes, and the most curious, had wondered for a few seconds, but with the discovery of the avenue of escape stopped her speculative musings. Now she was content to climb into the truck and sit by the side of her man and let what be come to pass....

"AAH!" Pablo sighed in satisfaction as the motor coughed for an instant at the touch of the starter, and snorted into a steady purr. "I will say an *Our Father* for this one who left this for us."

"And I, *a Hail Mary,*" Maria said, making the sign of reverence as she spoke.

Pablo set the truck into gear, reversing until the front end was on the highway, then setting it into successive speed, started toward Seville. The road wound down among the hills toward what some considered the most beautiful city in all Spain. They crossed a stream and another and at last came to a large bridge spanning one of the larger rivers before the Guadalquivir. On their end a couple of sentry boxes of stone guarded the approaches. From experience Pablo knew one or the other of the guards would step out and challenge him. Therefore he curbed the truck along the near gutter and idled the motor until the guard approached. A small smile parted the heavily mustached lips. Their arms were deep under the bags of grain. To all appearances they were a farmer and his wife going into town.

After they had waited for perhaps a couple of minutes Pablo became a little worried. It was not right that someone had not come. Whispering a word of caution to Maria, Pablo climbed out, and cap in hand approached the stone box. An electric bulb made light the interior. Why Pablo suddenly moved tip-toe he didn't know. But a something like a voice from the air made him cautious. Instead of coming directly to the door, Pablo stepped around to one side and peered into one of the small squares of window glass. His eyes and mouth opened wide in terror, yet though the shriek he felt in his voice box had to come out, his throat was closed even for his breath. Slowly, he took one step backward, then another and a third, and at the fourth turned and raced for the truck.

"What is wrong? Pablo! What did you see...." Maria queried as he leaped into the cab.

But he did not answer, only turned a blanched face forward and pressed hard against the accelerator and gripped the steering wheel with all his strength. The truck fairly leaped across the bridge. It was a full five minutes before the terror of what he had seen abated sufficiently for him

(Continued On Page 146)

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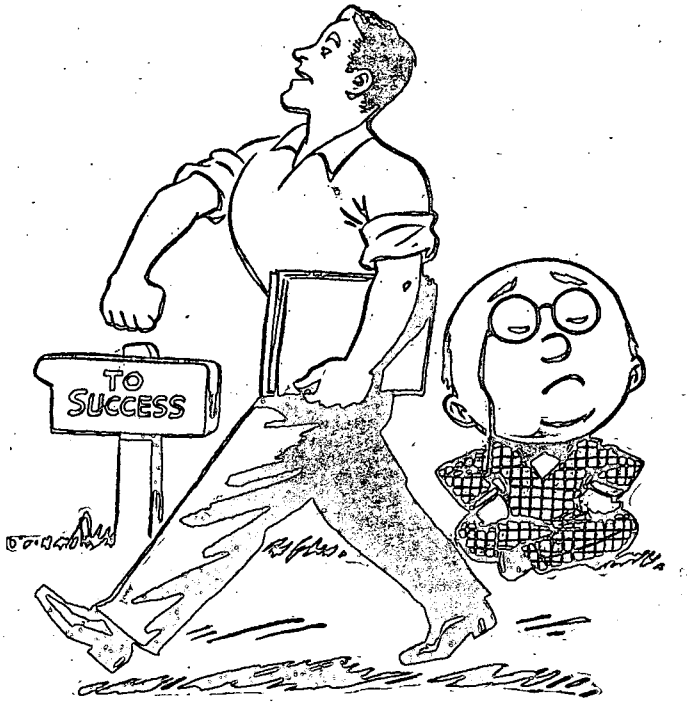
How to pass a genius



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(Continued From Page 144)
to tell Maria what he saw.

"I cannot describe him or it," Pablo said. "It was in a corner huddled against a wall, naked as the day it was born. It had arms and legs but I did not see its sex. I only saw its face, like a devil from Hell...." He shuddered in remembrance, then continued, "I saw its eyes and I turned and ran. It was like looking into something evil...."

Maria shuddered. Perhaps it was one of those creatures the old women in the village used to speak of. Creatures the Devil sent up from the depths. They even said there were many humans like that....Suddenly Maria groaned aloud.

Pablo turned his head quickly. "What is wrong?"

"Nothing," she said and smiled shyly as she spoke. "It is the young one. Already he feels the prison of my flesh and wants to be let out."

Pablo set his mouth tightly. The one who was soon to be born. Another reason why they had to get to Ramos. Maria would need a midwife....He tried to figure back the time, but the exact months escaped him. He knew it was soon, however. He cursed the day the Nationalists took over.

IT HAD happened several years before. The old regime under the, *Strutting Dwarf*, as some called him, had ended. Then another group took command. And these had been even worse. Spain had fallen under truly evil days. The whole world was full of corruption and Spain too was lending its weight....There had been talk in the village of why the battalion of *Guards Nationalistas* had come. But not even the village priest knew the real reason, that the region was fairly alive in ores necessary for the weapons of war. The Guards had conscripted every man, woman, and child large enough to work, for labor in the mines. The only exceptions were certain farmers, and of course the Marquis. His vines bore the golden grape, the purple richness of liquid forgetfullness.

Suddenly Pablo felt the stirrings of a song, an Andalusian folk song he used to sing in his youth. It told of the wondrous days of old, of days when the sun was hot and the nights cool and men and women were free and lived accordingly, and the fields were ripe with the golden grain and a man could drink the heady wines and love with sweet abandon, and go to town on fiesta and holy days and be as one with God. The old, old days, now gone forever....

Softly, the words fell from his lips. And after a moment Maria joined him in his signing.

So they rode, singing, down the slope of the road until it leveled for the last miles before it reached Seville. Pablo caught sight of a road-marker. It said they were but ten *kilometers* from the city. Something which had been bothering his subconscious came to life then. There was no traffic on this artery, and there should have been. No, it wasn't empty. Pablo remembered a number of cars parked on the road. In fact they had to make several quick detours about some they had come on unexpectedly, their parking lights not showing. But of moving traffic there was none.

Pablo had wondered about those cars parked so strangely in the very middle of the road. But it had only been a momentary wonder. He had other worries. He caught sight of another marker, this one of five *kilometers*. And now they were in the suburbs of Seville. Here were the villas of the rich, of those with power and wealth. Yet not a light showed in a single home.

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PABLO slammed the brakes on suddenly. They had come to an impasse of cars seemingly placed in the most incongruous of places, some at right angles to the road, others with their snouts up over the curbs, and some even on the grass and walks. It was impossible to get around them.

The man and woman looked at each other in wonder.

"Well," Pablo said, shrugging his sloping shoulders. "I have always heard city folk are crazy, but this...."

"We can go no further....?" Maria asked.

"Not unless we get wings! Well, then, on foot. I know the way."

"But our weapons. Shall we take them?"

Pablo put out his right hand, his index finger pointing.

"....Look! There is Seville. But if it were not for the moon reflecting against the cathedral and palace heights we could not know could we? Yes, we can see the river. But for some reason, there is no light in Seville. I will take the pistols. They can easily be hidden. But we cannot risk the rifles and belts. Come, Maria!"

The streets were deserted, yet not deserted. It was as if they were the center of eyes peering at them from hidden places, as if they were being spied upon. They walked close to each other, as though in understanding of a mutual protection.

It was not long before they reached the city limits and started for the quayside.

"Pablo," Maria whispered, "I am frightened."

"Of what?"

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"I do not know. The stillness perhaps. Where are all the people? It is like a place of death.. Aiiee!" her voice ended in a long-drawn scream.

Pablo's hand swept down into his shirt and came up with one of the pistols. He too had seen the shape of something directly ahead. It was not a dog, though at the moment the thing was down on all fours. For when they first saw it, it was erect. It was a man, completely naked, and the man was bathed in a scarlet glow as if from an internal paint.

The creature was trotting toward them, and as it neared strange noises issued from it, mewing sounds, animal sounds. Pablo threw his free arm around his wife's waist and drew her back, trying to force her behind him. But she seemed turned to stone in her fright.

"Stay! Stay!" Pablo called hoarsely. "I shoot...."

It was odd but Pablo received the impression that the thing was trying to act friendly. He could not take a chance however. It was only a couple of yards from them, when suddenly it rolled over on its back and waved its legs about, much like a dog that wants its belly scratched.

"Do, do not go near!" Maria begged.

But Pablo had to solve this strange mystery. Holding the pistol ready for instant action he stepped forward and looked down at the man. There was a vacuous smile on the lips of the face turned to his. Pablo could not see the eyes because the lids were drawn together. But the man waved limp hands at him. Then Pablo looked closer and saw the spittle drooling from the corners of the lips, saw the lips themselves like those of an idiot's, and backed away with a shudder of revulsion.

HE WAS the first they saw like that but not the last, nor were they all men. But one and all were harmless. It was just that their senses had been taken from them. They lay about, or moved on all fours like apes, or crawled, each and every one naked as the day they were born. Only once were they molested. Pablo thought no more of killing the thing than if it had been some mad dog. The horror of it all did not escape them, but they simply could not bring themselves to ask why and how and what had done this thing.

They finally came to a street on which a great crowd had collected. It was like a scene from a Breughel drawing. Maria could not take it any more. Further, she became aware that her time was soon to come. She had been aware of pains but had not thought too much on them. Now they were forcing their attention on her. The sight of this crawling human-animal crowd was just too much for her.

"Ohh! No! Not any more of this, Pablo. Let us seek another way to the river...."

For the first time in his life, Pablo Menderes thought in quickened pace. He had been seeking the river. It had been his hope. Ramos, his friend was to play a large part, but essentially their escape hinged on the river. It led to the sea. There Pablo had relatives in one of the small coastal towns. Portugal was not far off.... The sight of these things now placed another thought in his mind.

Years before, in his youth, Pablo had flown as a flight sergeant. He knew he could fly again unless the only planes they had were of the jet type. The airport was not far off. His mind raced on in thought. Whatever had happened to these people had played no exceptions. Therefore the

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military personnel would be like these. With Maria's help it was just possible that escape would be a simple matter....

She followed obediently as he turned down a side street. He kept searching for signs of direction. A grunt of satisfaction escaped him when he spotted one. Nor was the way long. The age-old houses thinned out, became farther and farther apart as they reached the section where the new airport had forced the tearing down of homes. The man and woman seemed the only two alive in a world dead. Now they came to where the military held sway. Long rows of barracks appeared. They too, were empty of life. The moon was now low in the sky. Thin streamers of green clouds had formed and were fanned across the sky.

They walked across the long rectangle of parade ground and onto the wide aprons of concrete. Here were rows of planes of all kinds. Sleek jet jobs lay cheek by jowl with heavy forbidding bombers, also jet-propelled. Here were reconnaisance planes, two-seat scout planes, camera planes. Still life for war. There was such an air of futility about them....

Pablo walked among them touched one now and then with his roughened miner's hand, felt the sleek metal surface, like a man's fingers caress the sides of a favorite horse. But though he stroked their sides and loved the feel of the metal he could not find the one he sought. Hope died slowly. Then they were among the last of them.

Pablo squatted on his haunches and looked bleakly at the ships of the air.

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So many and not one among them all he could use. Maria's hand was on his shoulder as if in benediction.

"Perhaps in one of those metal houses....?" she spoke in a half-whisper.

PABLO LOOKED toward the hangars. There might be a chance. He got to his feet and moved to the closest. Nothing. But in the third which he tried was the very ship he wanted. Not a sleek pursuit job, but a small bomber. Within a matter of minutes he had checked the ship and found that with exception of one of the surplus tanks being empty the ship was ready to take to the skies. With Maria's aid, he managed to gas the ship up completely.

Then he made Maria comfortable in the co-pilot's seat, looked once more to the instrument panel and strapped the belt about his middle. The motors roared into action at the touch of the self-starter button. In a short while he taxied down the apron and onto the runway. He turned for a last look at Maria, whispered a barely audible prayer and gave it the gun.

"It will not be long before the dawn comes up," Maria said minutes later.

Pablo peered through the glass, saw the first mauve streamers of a new day's dawn and nodded. Below the sea was alight already. Suddenly a sound of pain came from Maria. Pablo's mouth opened but at the look of pain in her face he guessed the reason.

"Give me your knife, husband mine," she said. "And pray that it is sharp. I will go to the rear...."

Moments went by like centuries, and Pablo's senses dulled with the effort of trying to concentrate on the business of flying and of listening for some sound from Maria which would tell him the time was now. When it did come it came as a surprise. A weak call, barely heard.

He set the automatic pilot and unstrapped himself and walked to the rear of the plane where she had made herself comfortable. The sun was now up and peering through the glass. It touched the woman and the boy-child in her arms and bathed them in a supernatural glow.

Maria smiled up at her husband, then looked down at the golden child in her arms. Pablo made the sign of reverence and peered down at his son. Never had he seen so beautiful a child. And wonder of wonders, the infant turned a perfectly formed face up to his and a slow, sweet smile parted the lips....

* * *

THE largest atom bomb the world had ever known had exploded the day before over a European land. It was the start and end of the newest World War. For with its burst, nothing ever remained the same. Scientists from the beginning had said that the time might come when there would be no telling the reactions of a super-atom bomb. A chain reaction followed the wake of the explosion. And every living being in the entire world felt its impact. For that burst took the structure of the brain cells of humans and twisted them out of shape and made them over and turned all of humanity into an animal world.

All but two people. And those two happened to be in a mine in an obscure Andalusian mountain, a mountain which was almost completely lead, and a something else which acted as a buffer against the effects of the atom bomb. Then too they were the only ones at the lowest depth. So they escaped.

And so it was the new Adam was born. In a plane flying a lonely

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stretch of ocean, to a mother and father who were of strong peasant stock. So he was born, a child, the first of a completely new world. For no longer was the world the one they had known. They were the first of the new life, and a little child was to lead it....

THE END

TIC-TAC-TOE

★ By A. Morris ★

WE'VE OFTEN predicted the invention of mechanical or electronic games which would be capable of playing chess, or checkers or gin rummy, and beating its human opponent at every turn. We've said this would be a certainty—well, now it is!

It seems a young electronic engineer has built a small portable vacuum tube assembly which is capable of playing that good old game which almost everyone has played at one time or another—"tic-tac-toe". The inventor calls his game "tit-tac-toe", but it is identical to the old "x's" and "oh's". The machine cannot be beat. Circuits built into it guarantee that. The most that a very good player can hope for is a tie. Furthermore the machine cannot be deceived. It blocks off any attempts at cheating, or it shuts off if a mistake is made, nullifying the game. It behaves with incredible candor.

The inventor wisely has built into it, a control which can be set to allow a human opponent to win. Thus it is a machine with built-in "mercy". This means of course that the game isn't being played fairly. When the machine is operating perfectly and according to orders, it simply cannot be beaten. Its electronic brain consisting of vacuum tubes and electrical circuits, is superior in its limited way to any human brain. This principle will be extended undoubtedly to more complicated games like chess and checkers eventually. The millenium has come! Even machines play our games for us. We'll be thankful however that such machines exist, especially if there is another war. For it is only one little step from such a machine to the robot brain of an anti-aircraft firing director, or from the brain of a remote controlled missile. We wish the young scientist more luck in his developments. If he ever makes a machine which will play poker—and win—we'll be so astounded that we'll concede the possibility of *anything!*

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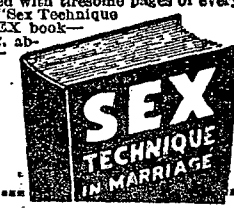

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READER'S PAGE

AN UPWARD TREND

Sirs:

This letter may turn out to be a bit longer than usual, but that's mainly because I'd like to talk about both the September and October issues of FA. So bear with me, ed!

The really big news with the September issue is the jump in page content to over 160 pages. I hope that this reflects an upward trend—and that it is only the beginning!

The stories in the September issue: There were, in my opinion, four good yarns. The best was Rog Phillips' "Incompatible". I agree with all the praise you gave it in the editorial. But, really—that illustration!...

"Backward Passage" was about as good as "The Magic of Joe Wilks". These are worthy of the "old" FA. The other story which is also worthy of some mention was the cover story, "Invasion of the Plant Men". The rest of the stories were well plotted and fairly well written, but they could have been better. It's interesting to note that the four top stories were by regular contributors. But don't let that stop you from giving us new authors. No, indeed. Now I have a mss...

Seriously though, when will we get a new story by Sherman or Francis? And how about that sequel to "Forgotten Worlds" that I've been asking for? Surely Chandler can come up with a doozy.

I'd like to take time out here to invite all readers of FA and AS—and any other stf or fantasy fans to join "The International Science Fiction Correspondence Club". This club is nearly a year old now, and next month we're having our first elections. By the time this sees print (hopefully) our officers will be instated and attending to their respective duties. We have nearly a hundred members at the present time, and we have a section of a fanzine to ourselves. By the time this is announced we hope to have one all of our own.

There is no entrance fee, or anything like it. And until we can get going, there will be no charge for the fanzine. All a member has to do is write to some of the other members. Trading magazines is encouraged, and we try to make all transactions fair for the benefit of everybody. And remember, this club belongs to its members, so why not write to me and join up. We'd like to have a hundred new members!

For my own part at the moment, I would like to get copies of any weird, stf, or fantasy pocket books from readers of FA who may have some they want to dispose of. I have several dozen pocket books of mystery and western flavor, that I would like to exchange for stf and fantasy. I will trade any three of these for one stf book. Or, five for any issue of the Avon Fantasy Reader from number four up.

Now to get down to reviewing the October FA. I thought that the most interesting thing in the entire issue was the announcement of the forthcoming 55,000 word Rog Phillips novel. I can hardly wait to read that one!

The stories? I have read them—and this is what I found: Phillips was the best in the issue—as usual. That's why I'm eagerly awaiting his long novel. If your best writer can't turn out a swell novel, who can? But to return to "Planet of the Dead". I had only two gripes with the story. Number one, I thought the title could have been a bit more distinctive, and two, the way you spelled develope on page fifty-one. Mighty small gripes at that.

Robert Moore Williams remains your second best writer. I liked his style in "The Bees of Death" very much. Only again—that title!

The third best story was "The Form of Hunger". It's fantasy, in spite of the space ships etc., but good. No beautiful maidens. Which reminds me, I liked the way in which Phillips and Williams introduced their love interest, then allowed the "and they lived happily ever after" to be figured out by the reader. Nice, subtle writing. "The Beacons Must Burn" should burn. I didn't care for this story. And although Alexander Blade is one of your very good writers, I thought the "Octopus of Space" was below par for him. Why not give Alex a little breathing spell for awhile?

Which about winds up this long epistle. Just keep FA coming out—and the bigger the better for my money!

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W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Road
North Tonawanda, N.Y.

Thanks for the nice long letter, Paul, and your praise and criticisms are equally appreciated. Well, by now you've read the new novel by Rog Phillips. So drop us a line and let us know what you thought of it. ...And we hope your fan club will grow to even more than two h u n d r e d members! How about it, gang? .....Ed.

LET'S HAVE MORE NOVELS

Sirs:

Congratulations on your October issue! I had just about come to the conclusion that FA and AS were on the downward path, and then I got the October issue of FA! Leading this issue of issues was Robert Moore Williams' "The Bees of Death". I do not believe that RMW has ever received any adverse criticism; I know that I enjoy every story by Williams that I read. He has been featured a lot lately in FA, and that is as it should be.

"The Octopus of Space" was a well written tale, by a top writer, Alexander Blade. And Rog Phillips' "Planet of the Dead", while a good story, was not quite up to the standard Phillips usually maintains. "The Form of Hunger" by Craig Browning was a unique little short that pleased me thoroughly. It was good!

"The Beacons Must Burn" is relegated to last place in the issue, only because the other stories were so much better.

Now for a few other comments. Ye ed says that "The Eye of the World" was published as a two part serial because there wasn't room in one issue and still have a well balanced format of shorts etc.

I say you are wrong! Did anybody complain when you ran "The Green Man"? Sherman's story was 86,000 words long. I didn't hear anything but praise when you published Shaver's "Gods of Venus" which was some 87,000 words long. And how about "Empire of Jegga" which ran 90,000 words!

I maintain that your policy of running shorts and novelettes is wrong. One l-o-n-g story by a good writer is better than an anthology of shorter lengths. That is my opinion, at any rate.

I look forward to reading Rog Phillips' new novel, "The Involuntary Immortals" in an early issue. As a matter of fact, I await it with bated breath!

Dave Hammond
806 Oak St.
Runnemede, N.J.

First off, Dave, we're glad you liked the October issue of FA so well. We thought it was one of our better issues

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too! . . . And now a few comments to add to yours on the subject of novels etc. We agree with you that we did publish the stories you mentioned in full in one issue. But there's one thing you are forgetting. When we published those stories, AS and FA were at least 178 pages in size, and could more easily absorb longer length stories. When "The Eye of the World" was run, both magazines were 146 pages, so you can see that it was just out of the question to run an 80,000 worder complete in either magazine. Today, however, you will note that your favorite magazines are enlarging again. Right now we are 162 pages, and we hope to be able to give you even better news in the near future. But the point is, that we are now able to give you novel length stories complete again. And what better start along these lines than the present Rog Phillips novel in this current issue? Which reminds us, let us know how you liked it—now that you've got your breath back!.....Ed.

A GOOD ISSUE

Sirs:

I'm really glad to see the Reader's Page back again in FA. It's the final touch to a fine magazine.

"The Beacons Must Burn" was one of the best stories I've read since the "Star Kings". But it seems to me that Warren Kastel forgot about the strong gravity of Io. At least he didn't mention it. "The Form of Hunger" ran a very close second.

"The Octopus of Space" was a close third. I thought that the title could just as well have been "Dark Shield", but this is a small criticism for a story that was very good on the whole.

Fourth place was "The Bees of Death". About average in a topnotch issue.

Fifth: "Planet of the Dead". How could the author of "So Shall Ye Reap" and "Starship From Sirius" fall so low? Why this story was really mediocre. I hope that Rog sticks to stories like "Unthinkable" which was really original.

Well, see you next month.

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Keran O'Brien
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Not much we can add except that it seems to us, if our memory is correct, that the diameter of Io is 2,109 miles, and that of Luna, the Earth's satellite, 2,159 miles. This would give them almost the identical size, and since the Moon's gravity is one sixth that of Earth, it would seem that Io's gravitational attraction should be about the same. Could it be that you have confused Jupiter, the mother planet of Io, with the satellite in arriving at your "strong" gravity point?.....Ed.

PAGING PAUL GANLEY

Sirs:

In the October issue of FA you published a letter by Paul Ganley, in which Paul claimed that Shaver's story, "The Cyclopeans" was lousy. One of his main objections was that the idea of the Moon bouncing was lifted from a story in AS. I read the story he means. That one *was* lousy!

Though perhaps Shaver did not "lift" the idea from that particular yarn, it could be true that the Moon might have struck the earth with cataclysmic force and rebounded, many years ago. In that case, it could hardly have been "lifted". I've read many stories of the Earth being round—and yet no one ever accused the author of stealing from Columbus!

Brian McNaughton
198 Bergen Place.
Red Bank, N.J.

We'll kind of leave an answer to your letter up to Mr. Ganley. What say, Paul, do you agree?.....Ed.

FANTASTIC FACTS

★ By Lee Owens ★

BOOMERANG

SOME OF the ancient arts, such as archery, can hardly be improved upon. Many modern enthusiasts have constructed bows and arrows of different materials and different designs and to a certain extent have improved the art. But the improvement hasn't been earth-shaking. It comes primarily from the fact that the modern dilettante has better materials with which to work. An examination of books on modern archery will show some improvements over the older weapons but nothing like one would tend to expect.

A G.E. scientist, Chauncey Suits has tried his hand at another primitive weapon favored this time by the aborigines of Australia, the boomerang. On a trip to Oceania, Suits found himself amazed at

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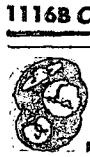

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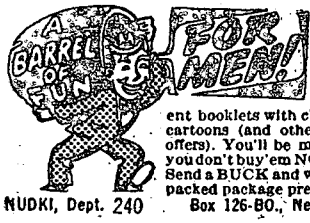

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the way the bushmen were able to throw the curved piece of wood. Their accuracy and skill were impressive, but with the scientific curiosity that plagued him, he wasn't satisfied until he too learned the art. So Suits set to work to make himself a boomerang expert. But he did it the scientific way. He performed what might be called an "aerodynamic analysis", on the boomerang, and found that it could stand some improvement. The bushmen, once they had made an operable boomerang, tended to standardize it without experimenting, for fear any changes would be bad. But Suits was naturally hampered by no such fears.

His analysis disclosed exactly how a boomerang should be shaped to give maximum effect. The result of his labor is hardly to be seen for the improvement lay in changing the profile of the boomerang slightly. Never the less, the range and returnable accuracy are enormously improved. It might be said that this was the first improvement in the boomerang in about two thousand years!

Trial and error worked remarkably well for the primitive peoples who made the first bow, the first spear, the first sword and so on. By sheer test, their weapons worked surprisingly well. Any analysis we may later perform, show that they knew what they were doing. Spears used by certain African tribes today, identical to the spears used by their forefathers a thousand years ago, are effective agents of death. And when examined by the critical eye of modern man with a view to improving them, no such need is found. A steel head may be better than a fire-hardened copper one—but the copper doesn't rust. So what's the advantage. The native generally manages to get along quite well without the interference of the laboratory. And Robin Hood didn't have his long bow analyzed either!

* * *

NO MORE BUGS?

MAN HAS taken a long stride toward grasping and controlling his environment. It is not his huge dams, or his reforestration programs that makes this true. Rather it is his present ability to take command of one of his greatest enemies. The insect world figuratively is trembling in the shadow of terrific drug-killers like DDT and its derivitives. With these chemicals Man is converting pestilential spots into paradise. While the scale is yet small on which drugs are used, it is increasing, and the farmer and the agricultural scientist, are finally commanding their lands.

It has been seriously suggested that from the standpoint of survival of the fittest, that insects should rule the world! And furthermore it has been suggested that that is their ultimate destiny. They

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outnumber Man enormously, they are hardy, they are terrific organizers, they have a clannish intelligence and they do not know fear. Most of Man's chemical weapons, while hurting them, have not dismayed them to any great extent. But from the laboratories of the bifurcated mammal with the brain, now have come chemical agencies of ferocious killing power before whose flail, the insect world crumbles like chaff before the scythe.

In certain areas of Southern Europe, all of Asia, much of South America and most of Africa, the insect world holds man at bay. But the stalemate is about to end, for the chemical weapons are becoming cheap and common and the insects cannot adapt to them. Therefore they must die for their adaptivity is too slow; undoubtedly they could adapt—after a hundred million years. But men are pressing them to the wall.

Soon many of the pestilential areas of the world will be converted into potential garden spots. The battle is by no means won and ecology does not predict an easy victory ever, but at least the advance forces have contacted the enemy and are throwing him back.

Now Man's other enemy remains to be fought—the rodent. No matter what the level of industrialization or civilization of a country—and this includes the United States—the common brown rat, still takes his dreadful toll in property, food, energy and indirectly, in lives. Again Man is arming for the combat. With chemicals, gases, flames and electronics, he is marshaling over-whelming forces to defeat the hairy little monsters.

The ecologists know that as tough as their opponents are, man possesses that one thing against which nothing so far can stand—a brain!

* * *

BAD GUESSES

SOMETIMES scientists make fools of themselves. Many times one wonders how people of a scientific bent may make statements concerning the natural resources of the Earth. You often hear that "science says there is enough coal for another three hundred years," or "our oil supply will last only fifty more years!" Then you ask them, "how do you know these things?" and they tell that "geological surveys" have shown this or that to be the case.

We've been warned again and again that our oil is running. We know that iron ore and copper ore and other metallic ores of the known deposits are decreasing. The great Mesabi iron ranges in Minnesota are slowly being depleted. Naturally we are using up natural resources. But things are not quite as bad as these purveyors of gloom would have us believe.

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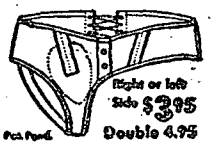

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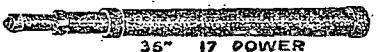

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For the truth of the matter is that we actually have no idea of how rich the world is in any given mineral—with the possible exception of radium and uranium. This is borne by a recent statement issued by a group of petroleum scientists who have finally made a brilliant—if simple—statement to the effect that they simply dare not estimate how much oil there is in the world. In a word, they do not know—and they admit it frankly. The reason they came out with this astonishing statement is this: Recently enormous deposits of oil have been discovered in Canada. Since so much of the earth hasn't been explored in detail by the geologists, who is to say that there are not still more gigantic deposits of oil and minerals.

And what of the unknown quantities of materials far under the Earth? It is our private opinion that science, advancing in gigantic leaps as it is, is going to turn up new prospecting methods which will reveal the existence of hitherto unguessed at masses of minerals, ranging from copper to coal through oil. Certainly Man need not fear the depletion of the Earth's resources. We haven't been working the mines long enough nor exhaustively enough. It is dangerous for men to think that they're so big that they're depleting the Earth. To nature, a billion tons of iron ore is nothing. When we really begin to probe into the bowels of the Earth we are likely to find the existence of overwhelmingly huge masses of everything. Don't worry then, about there not being enough for everybody and everything. Furthermore, synthesis and the utilization of new materials like magnesium and titanium free us from former dependence on the old standbys. So goes the world of science. There is no end to the riches in sight.

* * *

RADIOACTIVES

"RADIOACTIVES" is the name applied to those many materials which may be made radioactive by being brought into contact with substances giving off emanations of alpha, beta and gamma radiations. These radioactives, compounds such as various salts of sodium, and elements like carbon, are used in many new applications. It is common knowledge—the use of "tracers" in the blood stream, or the injection of radioactives in plants in order to learn more about very elusive phenomena. The science of mechanics is using radioactives.

A fine example of this is in the study of bearings. In sleeve and ball and roller bearings, despite lubrication it has been known that wear occurs. Otherwise a bearing would never fail but would last indefinitely. Since bearings fail even though they apparently are in perfect order, it is evident that metal is being transferred from one to another, that

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wear is taking place somehow.

So scientists take radioactive materials and impregnate bearings with them. Then they operate the machine in which the bearings are located. When the bearings are dismantled and examined, even though they appear perfect, the amount of transferred bearing material may be ascertained by measuring the race or opposing portion of the bearing against which the ball or surface of the shaft has worn. This is done simply with a Geiger counter. By such means, even the most minute quantity of material can be detected. The practical value of this research is that it will lead to the eventual construction of superior bearings. While this is a single example, there are many more from all branches of mechanics. Should one desire to know how cutting occurs in a lathe tool, the radioactives will tell a lot.

Of all the material held secret by the Atomic Energy Commission, the use of tracers is fortunately not one of them. Tracers and radioactives are being used all over the world. We can expect the most spectacular results in medicine where radioactives have their greatest application.

There is strong hope that radioactives will supply a clue to the origin and nature of cancer so that this fearsome disease may eventually be defeated. And so radioactives will be used wherever Man's skill can apply them to pry deeper into the eternal mystery of things...

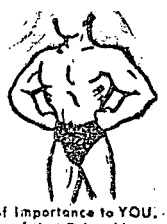
* * *

ARCTIC AGONY

MANY SLEEPLESS nights are being spent by the men who plan the conduct of any possible future warfare. This is particularly true of those who are assigned to preparing a defense for that vital exposed northern frontier of ours, that frontier which borders the top of the world and in which Canada will play an important part in defending should any aggressor attempt to come at us from over the Arctic Circle.

This is a barren area of snow and ice, bitter cold and inhospitable land. Ice and snow and water and wind;—these are the elements which will oppose any contending forces. The object is to manage somehow to enlist them on our side. So far that project isn't too rosy. How can men carry on warfare in a climate where to bare a hand or nose is to freeze it? How can men fight when engines freeze and refuse to start? Shafts can't turn in bearings lined with frozen grease. The whole technique of mechanized warfare requires modification.

The only answer is to be lavish with energy. Machines can be built to operate under these trying conditions. After all, almost no problem is insoluble to a man once he sets his mind to it. All sorts of auxiliary heating devices are employed to take the edge of the cold. The main thing



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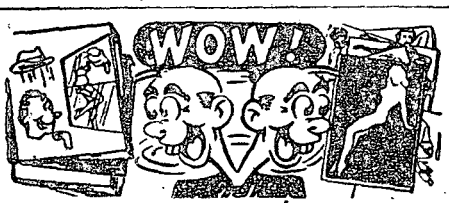

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is that these things are prodigal of another precious commodity—oil. Since fuel is the keynote, look for another type. The lavishness of atomic energy would be the perfect answer, but that isn't too common—yet. The discovery of vast deposits of oil in Canada has had a salutory effect on the Arctic warfare plan. It means that fuel will be within considerably shorter distances. Consequently we can plan on using it generously.

Fortunately any enemy attempting the Arctic route to our country will be exposed to the same problems and dangers that beset us. He too will have to fight them, with the added disadvantage that he will be drawing farther and farther away from his bases of supply. But we mustn't believe that that alone would stop him. We know passiveness and trust in defense doesn't stave off invaders. Our own aggressive defending forces will be counter-attacking across the frozen lands and through the bitter air, five minutes after the attack is known.

* * *

PRINTED CIRCUITS

PRINTED circuits were considered in this magazine not long ago. It was clear that at that time they were still in the laboratory or experimental stage although a large radio factory in England was using them on a grand scale. Since then a number of things have happened.

To begin with let us consider what they are. Printed circuits merely refers to the art of using lines, printed in silver paint for wires, printed lines of carbon paint for resistors, and ceramic-silver sheet discs for capacitors. Such circuit elements mean simplicity, extreme speed of assembly, extraordinary compactness and lightness (they may be printed right on a radio tube) and ease of replacement. Also the cost is low. It was expected that printed circuits would find a wide use in all sorts of equipment ranging from hearing aids, proximity fuses, television sets, to industrial electronics equipment. They have been used and are being used in all these capacities. If you own a TV set the chances are it contains a number of circuits printed on a ceramic sheet.

Printed circuits are now available to the amateur who would like to play around with this new technique. This is one sign of the rapid acceptance of the principle. It is possible to purchase a number of kits, containing silver and carbon paint along with instructions. Using these materials, applying them with an ordinary artist's brush or a draftsman's ruling pen, one can build almost any radio component circuit with ease. In some instances radio repair men have found that the materials are excellent for replacement work and repairs.

The nice thing about working with these

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ircuit elements is that since they are still ew, many undiscovered uses exist for hem. A clever experimentor might be able o devise some astonishing ideas, of a very, ractical nature. Regardless of that, he ertainly will learn a lot and certainly vill be well satisfied with a system that ermits him to construct a whole amplifier vithin little more space than is occupied y the vacuum tubes of the device. We uggest you watch all electronic gadgetry. The printed or painted circuit is here to tay—with emphasis—it's going to take ver a lot of fields which might not occur o you. Pass me the paint brush, Wilbur; 'm going to build a TV receiver!

* * *

INTUITION VERSUS REASON

IT WAS once very fashionable for any person with a scientific turn of mind o ridicule any connotations attached to he word intuition. It had no place in the exicon of science whose god-word was the ll powerful "reason". But times have hanged and attitudes have broadened. No onger is intuition laughed at. Instead it s realized now that this maligned faculty f the human mind is actually the in- piration and guide, the "kick" and the orce behind so-called "reason".

No one has ever given a satisfactory xplanation of intuition. This elusive capa- ility of the human mind is hard to iso- late, hard to describe, hard to touch, even though it is the commonest experience we know of. How often does one suddenly "see" a new idea, of "grasp" a new thought, or "understand" a vague princi- ple? Many, many times as anyone will agree from personal experience. Here there was no chain of involved reasoning, working from one fact to another. Instead something "pop" within the mind and there is the answer.

This is particularly true in mathematics which has a whole group of philosophers who believe that intuition is the basis of all mathematical discovery. They even call themselves the "intuitionists". And it is generally conceded that they are on the right track for no analysis of the great discoveries of mankind ever shows any system. There seems to be no rhyme nor order to invention or discovery. Instead, "something" wells up within the human mind which provides the key to whatever is being sought at the time.

However for mathematical success it is agreed that the blend of reasoning ability, the capability of seeing long related chains of ideas, is as important as any intuitive flashes. One complements the other. From Galileo and Newton and Leibnitz, to Einstein and Eddington, the same princi- ple applies. Intuition—then reason! And as if by magic a new world appears.

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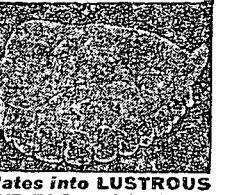

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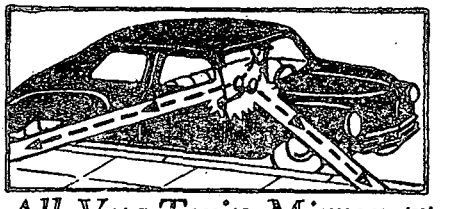

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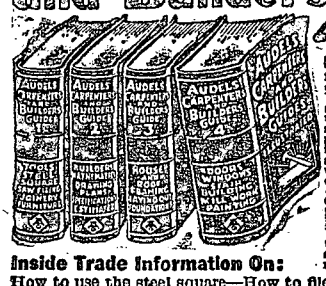

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and tested and none has devised an explanation. The "God-given faculty" of the theologians defies analysis. No one can lie the human mind on the dissecting table or the analysts' couch and probe into its basic secrets. Perhaps that will come. If the new science of cybernetics which treats of the relations between control processes in such remote things as machines and human beings, comes to full promise, it may provide a clue.

It is dangerous however to put any limitations on the scientific method so we had not better make a blanket statement "it can't be done", for too often have those remarks a way of coming back to haunt us, like MacBeth's nemesis. So here's hoping again! It's easier to think of the questions than the answers. Maybe that too can be reversed, although a number of scientists have affirmed that to ask an intelligent question is even harder than giving an answer. Ask Nature a stupid question and she flings it back into your face, leaving you at a loss. How well the Michelson-Morley experiment showed that. But when the question was revised, look at the beautiful answer we got—relativity!

* * *

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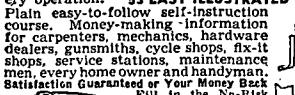

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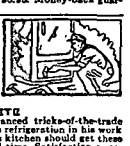

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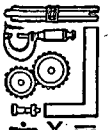

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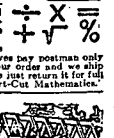

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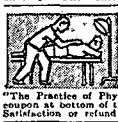

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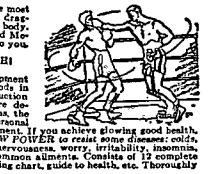

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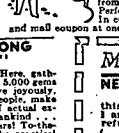

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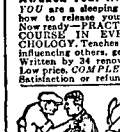

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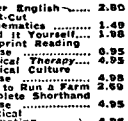

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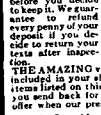

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